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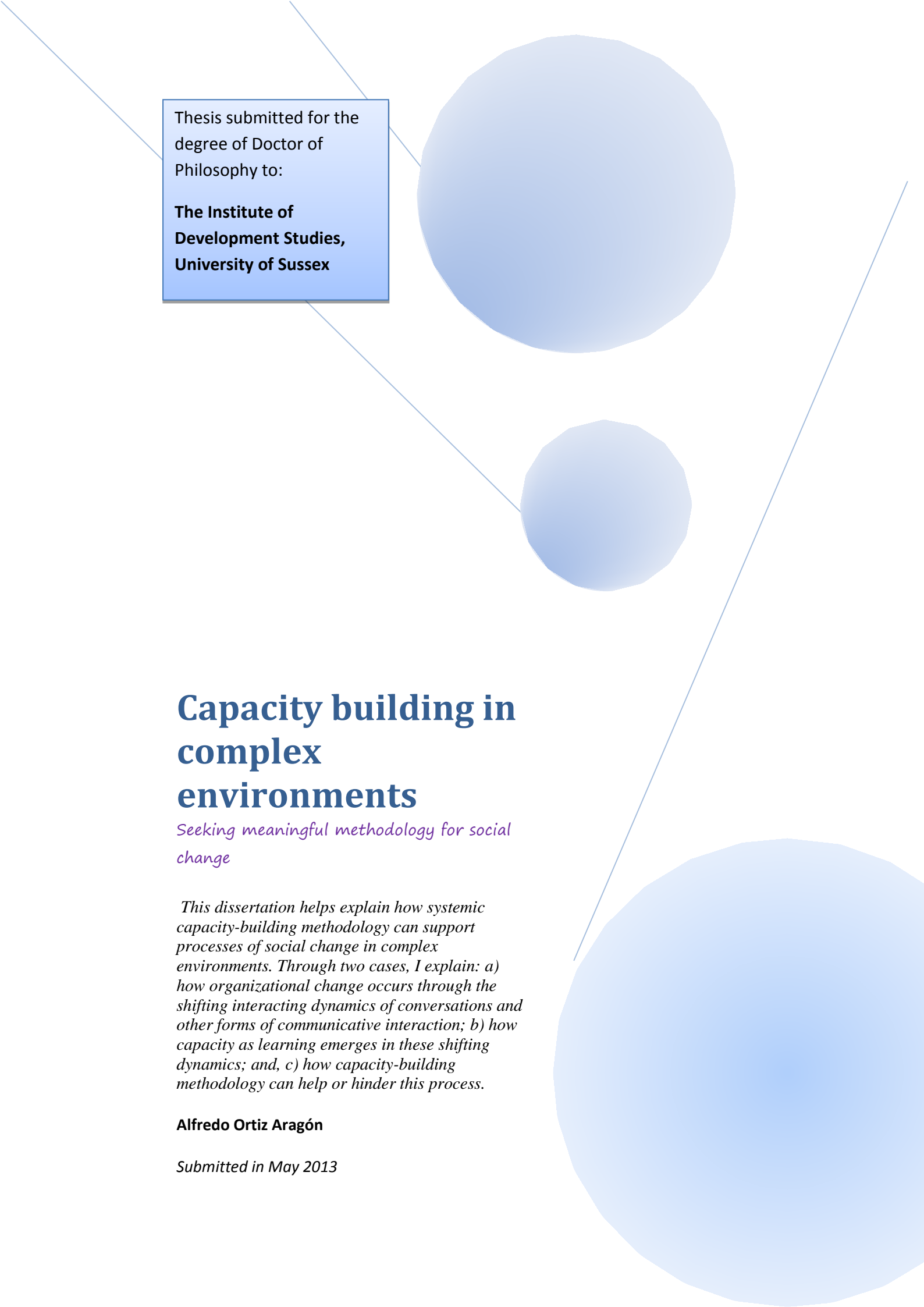
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degree of Doctor of
Philosophy to:

**The Institute of
Development Studies,
University of Sussex**

Capacity building in complex environments

*Seeking meaningful methodology for social
change*

This dissertation helps explain how systemic capacity-building methodology can support processes of social change in complex environments. Through two cases, I explain: a) how organizational change occurs through the shifting interacting dynamics of conversations and other forms of communicative interaction; b) how capacity as learning emerges in these shifting dynamics; and, c) how capacity-building methodology can help or hinder this process.

Alfredo Ortiz Aragón

Submitted in May 2013

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Summary

This dissertation explores ways in which “capacity-building” might contribute to processes of social change in complex environments. This exploration emerged as part of a personal journey as a capacity-building practitioner to help make sense out of my prior work experience. In my experience, I learned first-hand how many of the “capacity” challenges that my colleagues and I were trying to address in different organizations were complex, “messy” and uncertain. At the same time, many of the capacity-building tools and methodological processes I commonly used assumed a world that was predictable, neat and controllable. These assumptions led to many occasions in which capacity-building processes and methods did not make sense in specific situations, or did not generate expected significant changes. I saw my PhD as a way of addressing many unanswered questions and developing capacity-building methodology that would be relevant to the complex realities in which I worked.

At the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), I became much more aware not only of the complexity of my prior capacity-building work in development, but also of its apolitical nature. I was well aware of the contested nature of social change, both from my prior studies and my previous life and work experiences. However, after nine years working as a capacity-building process designer and facilitator for a large American Non-governmental Organization (NGO), I had come to use methodology without considering whether it might even be compatible with concepts of social change. I mostly assumed methodology to be neutral and apolitical, *but did not see this as a problem*. In my PhD process, I was fortunate to see first-hand how methodology that practitioners assume to be apolitical actually lacks a theory capable of explaining change, and thereby may reproduce the status quo. This is a strong political position indeed.

My research starts from the assumption that the way people and organizations change in relation to economic, social and environmental concerns is complex and contested. Complex, in that multiple actors and factors—many of them unknowable—combine to affect how social change actually emerges in real life. Contested, in that power relations enable and constrain the fields of possibility for positive change for all people, and thereby generate winners and losers in the process. Indeed, the contested nature of social change is one of its primary sources of complexity. Methodologically, I conducted two action-research processes over 18 months; one with a progressive organization that supports social movements in Perú, and the other with a private environmental conservation organization in Ecuador. I used an emergent, learning-based action-research (AR) approach strongly influenced by systemic theories, with a particular focus on Peter Checkland’s Soft Systems Thinking (SST). Different methodological principles emerged in each organizational AR process, providing important insights into how capacity-building can support social (and socio-environmental) change processes in complex environments.

Whereas SST and AR prominently informed my methodology, Ralph Stacey, Patricia Shaw, and Douglas Griffin’s “Complex Responsive Processes” (CRP) was the main theory I used to connect methodological capacity-building intervention to complexity theory. CRP is a theory that explains how complex adaptive systems (CAS) emergently self-organize *from local, communicative interaction*. Drawing on these different sources and based on my empirical data, my dissertation explores the following themes:

- How organizational learning and change occur through the shifting interacting dynamics of conversations and other forms of communicative interaction, and how organizational capacity emerges in these shifting dynamics.
- How capacity-building methodology can help surface—via communicative interaction—the complexity of social change that organizations face. Particularly:
 - How methodology that engages multiple ways of knowing is helpful in accessing doorways to diverse thought, feelings, and identity, and how this diversity plays a key role in influencing the patterns of communicative interaction that emerge.

- How the intentional contrasting of multiple, diverse perspectives, and worldviews (i.e.—SST focus) charges conversations with meaning and is capable of shifting patterns and generating learning in communicative interaction.
- How two ostensibly oppositional forms of methodology—methodological redundancy and unstructured reflection—enable and constrain how patterns of communicative interaction emerge and support learning, *when diversity is also present*.
- How all communicative interaction enacts power relationships that generate dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, and how these dynamics affect the patterns of communicative interaction—i.e. learning and change—that emerge.

These methodological findings lead to some interesting implications for how CB is conceived and practiced. If capacity as learning emerges in complex environments via shifts in communicative interaction, then a core purpose of CB becomes strengthening the ability of organizational participants—“within” an organization and in relation to key “system” stakeholders—to actively relate and interact with each other in organic (i.e. uncontrived) ways. This active relating is situational and as such implies looking for opportunities to “add” systemic methodological support to real-life situations and experiences.

My research has contributed new knowledge by helping explain how systemic capacity-building methodology can support processes of social change in complex environments. Systems thinking is often used anecdotally in capacity-building, without making explicit connections between theory and practice. Complexity theory, when referenced at all in capacity-building literature, is limited to claims about the need to act differently in a complex world. My research has made the following important contributions:

- 1) Provides empirical cases that connect systemic capacity-building methodology to Complex Responsive Processes theory in a plausible manner, and thus, make these connections more explicit.
- 2) Develops plausible connections between concepts of extended epistemologies (as a source of diversity) and complexity theory
- 3) Demonstrates the relative importance of critical reflection alongside the use of more-structured methods to generate organizational capacity
- 4) Offers—as a conversation starter—an alternative interactive communication understanding of capacity development, which asks critical questions of much dominant CD theory and practice.

I believe that the findings and learning from this research can help generate critical, non-linear approaches to capacity-building methodology that serve the needs of complex, contested social change in a more meaningful manner.

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At IDS

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At FFI, Sirua and PDTG

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Acronyms

AR	Action Research
AST	Appreciative Systems Theory
CAS	Complex Adaptive Systems
CBA	Awacachi Biological Corridor
CB	Capacity Building
CD	Capacity Development
CRP	Complex Responsive Processes
DAC/OECD	Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD)
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
FFI	Fauna and Flora International
FS	Sirua Foundation
HR	Human Resources
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IPCA	Iniciativa Paisaje Cotacachi Awa
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
M-A	Mining-Alert
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OD	Organization Development
PDTG	Program for Democracy and Global Transformation
PPT	PowerPoint
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
R/A	Reflect Action
RECC	Reserva Ecológica Cotacachi Cayapas
SCP	Senti-Cuerpo-Pensante
SL	San Lorenzo
SSM	Soft Systems Methodology
SST	Soft Systems Thinking
STOC	Systemic Theories of Change
TS	Tejiendo Saberes

1. Introduction and dissertation structure

1.1. Introduction

Capacity-building refers to a broad set of activities to which actors in the international development aid “system” allocate annually over a quarter of aid dollars—25 billion a year through formal technical assistance alone (OECD, 2006: 13, Richter, 2010: 1). This allocation contains an implicit assumption that NGOs, consultants, and other development interveners that conduct capacity-building work do so in a way that supports social change in some meaningful way. “Capacity, Change and Performance” (Baser and Morgan, 2008), considered to be the largest study to date on the concept of capacity (Fowler and Ubels, 2010: 24), does establish a relationship between capacity and social change. This study by the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) presents empirical evidence on how increases in organizational capacity of NGOs, non-profit hospitals, regional development agencies, and other development actors contributed to their “performance,” i.e., to more effective implementation of their work (see, for example: Rademacher, 2005, Morgan, 2005a, Hauck, 2004, Baser and Morgan, 2008). More effective performance could also be thought of as the “the result” of the application and use of capacity in these cases (Baser and Morgan, 2008: 4). The results of these studies produce a working assumption that interventions intended to strengthen the capacities of NGOs, if effective, might contribute to increased performance of these organizations, which would be evidenced by increased impact in the social change areas in which they focus. Indeed, this view has been a core assumption of *all* work I have engaged in over the last 13 years as a capacity-building practitioner. If capacity-building did not help NGOs increase their development impact, as well as their own learning, readiness (Ortiz and Taylor, 2009: 21) and response-ability (Fowler, 2000: 8) to do their work effectively in the future, it would be a waste of time and resources. Not surprisingly, in an attempt to answer the question “capacity for what”, much capacity-building literature looks for plausible connections (conceptual, practical and methodological) between capacity-building and social change or “impact” (Ubels et al., 2010, Taylor and Ortiz, 2008, Taylor and Clarke, 2008, Pearson, 2011, OECD, 2006, Morgan, 2005a, Lopes and Theisohn, 2003, Hailey et al., 2005, Baser and Morgan, 2008) (see **section 2.2.3** for a discussion on the meaning of social change).

However, systems thinking and complexity writers, in development and other fields, tell us that to think linearly about how interventions of any kind *cause* outcomes is problematic in complex environments (Burns, 2007, Checkland, 1981, 1993, Flood, 1999, Jackson, 2000, Midgley,

2000, Mowles et al., 2008, Snowden and Boone, 2007, Stacey, 2007). A linear view of change assumes that if I carry out activities X and Y, outcome Z will be generated. For example, if I train local community members on the importance of environmental protection, they will cut down fewer trees. If I provide condoms to sex workers, I can reduce the incidence of disease from unprotected sex. Or if I strengthen an organization's capacities in planning, monitoring and evaluation, these organizations will enjoy increased development impact. The problem with these cause and effect statements is that they ignore the complex elements of broader contexts that come to bear on whether these changes might actually occur. In complex environments, change *emerges* from a mostly unknowable combination of influences from multiple actors and factors which are in constant flux (Flood, 1999), thus making it 'impossible to predict with any confidence the relation between cause and effect' (Eyben et al., 2008: 203-4). This has implications for intentional efforts to affect change that must 'confront the impossibility of our ever having a total understanding of all the sets of societal relationships that generate change' (ibid). Taking the first example, local community members may harvest trees for ancestral reasons, for survival, or because a lucrative market for local wood exists that is facilitated by opportunistic local government officials and driven by consumption of high-quality furniture in markets far away. If woodcutting actually decreases, it will be due to a mix of factors not predictable in a linear, cause and effect manner. In complex environments, just as development interventions cannot be thought of to linearly "*cause*" development outcomes, capacity-building cannot be thought of to linearly *cause* improved capacities, nor can these capacities be assumed to contribute linearly to social change (Ortiz Aragón, 2010b: 43). What then are the relationships between capacity and change, and can capacity-building processes purposefully contribute to "good change" (Chambers, 2005: 186) in complex environments?

My research addresses an area that is virtually absent in the capacity-building literature: capacity-building methodology that is relevant and meaningful in supporting organizations working for social change in complex environments. The main audiences for my research are *organizations and organizational change facilitators (internal or external) who are seeking improved methodological clarity on how they can strengthen capacities to contribute to emergent, social change in complex realities*.

To approach this methodological challenge, I worked with the Program for Democracy and Global Transformation (PDTG)—an activist organization that supports subaltern social movements in Perú—and the Sirua Foundation (SF), a private conservation organization in Ecuador. I present these two cases in Chapters 4–7 to show how my research helped generate

purposeful capacity-building methodology that hopefully contained within its sociology some thinking able to better explain and grapple with change (Burrell and Morgan, 1979), in yet a critical, non-linear and meaningful manner.

1.2. Structure of the dissertation

- **Chapter 2** (*Research Interest and Conceptual Framework*) establishes the importance of my research subject and identifies a research gap. It then introduces my research questions and provides some additional literature to support the specific focus of my research questions
- **Chapter 3** (*Methodology*) provides:
 - A detailed explanation of the methodological assumptions that guided my research early on (Systemic Theories of Change (STOC)), including their genesis in my professional work before I began my PhD.
 - An explanation for my choice of case studies as objects of study and action research as an overall methodology.
 - Background information on my two cases studies.
 - A detailed introduction to the empirical analysis chapters that follow.
- **Chapters 4–7** present empirical data and analysis from my case studies. In section 3.7 I explain these chapters in more detail.
- **Chapter 8** draws summary implications from the empirical analysis and concludes the dissertation.

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2. My research interest and conceptual framework

2.1. Research interest—methodology to support purposeful capacity development in complex, contested social change environments

The idea of capacity-building methodology for social change brings together three themes that are problematic when taken together:

- Capacity building as purposeful interventions that support *processes of social change*
- The non-linear nature of social change and capacity development in complex environments
- The subjective (interpretive) and contested nature of “good” social change

2.1.1. *Capacity building as a set of purposeful interventions that support processes of social change*

A relevant, yet uncritical field

The term capacity development (CD) is relatively new in the field of development, first emerging in the late 1980s (Lusthaus et al., 1999: 1, Baser and Morgan, 2008: 7). Capacity development is often presented as having emerged as an aggregate of previous development approaches and practices, such as (Pearson, 2011: 11-12, Lusthaus et al., 1999: 2):

- Institution building, strengthening and development, primarily in the public sector (1950s–1970s)
- Development management that focuses on service delivery systems of the public sector to reach target groups (1970s)
- Human resource development that shifted the focus to “people-centered development,” including a focus on education, health, and population (1970s and 1980s)
- New institutionalism that expanded beyond public sectors and looked at broader economic development, shifted from projects to “sustainable” programs, and laid the groundwork for today’s “governance” focus (1980s and 1990s)

Capacity development in all of these iterations represented a shift towards more local ownership of development interventions, including the assumption that ‘developing countries should own, design, direct, implement, and sustain the process themselves’ (Pearson, 2011: 11). In present day, its mainstream introduction alongside technical cooperation and assistance, and development aid, represents a paradigm shift ‘from an approach based on technical capacities to one emphasizing the need to enhance human and organizational assets’ (Pearson, 2011: 10).

Baser and Morgan see capacity development as an issue of increasing global importance which is being emphasized in a much wider range of country situations, including its linkages to national security and the protection of global public goods, e.g.: ‘Capacity issues will therefore rapidly move beyond narrow issues of program implementation and take on broader geostrategic significance’ (Baser and Morgan, 2008: 121-122). Indeed, in spite of its newness, capacity development became the central purpose of technical cooperation in and since the 1990s and ‘has become the “way” to do development’ (Lusthaus et al., 1999: 2).

The literature contains significant critique of the concept and practice of capacity development, including its premises as a value-free solution to technical problems (Clarke and Oswald, 2010, Kenny and Clarke, 2010), as a heroic, simplistic approach that only focuses only on “positive value” (Miller, 2010), and as a dominant instrument of global managerialism that reinforces uncritical neoliberal worldviews and practices that maintain the status quo (Lewis, 2008, Ife, 2010, Gulrajani, 2010), rather than supporting development alternatives (Mitlin et al., 2007, Bebbington et al., 2008). Indeed, lost in most capacity-development literature is an explicit connection with social change (Ortiz Aragón, 2010b, Taylor and Clarke, 2008, Clarke and Oswald, 2010). I return to this issue in **section 2.1.3.**, but for now wish to highlight the importance of capacity development within current development discourse, practice, and investment (Hosono et al., 2011, Baser and Morgan, 2008).

Definitions of capacity, capacity-building and “purposeful” capacity development

Many terms and meanings are associated with the terms capacity development and capacity-building. Generally speaking, the term “capacity-building” refers to the act of trying to strengthen capacities of an individual, organization or group of organizations, whereas “capacity *development*” refers to the actual emergence of stronger or increased capacities (Ubels et al., 2010, OECD, 2006, Baser and Morgan, 2008). A commonly cited definition of capacity and capacity development comes from the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development’s (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC), the working group charged with coordinating implementation of the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness:

“Capacity” is understood as the ability of people, organisations and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully.

“Capacity development” is understood as the process whereby people, organisations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time. (OECD, 2006: 13)

According to the Development Assistance Committee, this definition is deliberately simple to ‘avoid any judgement on the objectives that people choose to pursue, or what should count as success in the management of their collective efforts’ (OECD, 2006: 13). A more recent compendium of practitioner perspectives on capacity development defines capacity as ‘the ability of a human system to perform, sustain itself and self-renew’, and capacity development as ‘changes in capacity over time’ (Ubels et al., 2010: 4). This definition also avoids judgements on specific objectives or values. ‘Capacity-development support’ (Ubels et al., 2010: 4) and ‘promotion of capacity development’ (OECD, 2006: 13) are the terms these sources use to describe deliberate attempts to make capacities grow beyond their existing condition. These terms are preferred over the more commonly used “capacity-building” because the “building” concept suggests attempts to strengthen capacities starting from a blank slate and a preconceived design (OECD, 2006: 12), as if constructing a building. According to these authors, this viewpoint is problematic because any capacity-building that ‘is not part of an endogenous process of change, getting its main impulse from within’, is unlikely to be effective (OECD, 2006: 15). “Capacity strengthening” is another term I and fellow practitioners have frequently used to describe our attempts to increase capacities.

Narrow definitions also exist in the literature, e.g., ‘Capacity is the ability to carry out stated objectives’ (LaFond and Brown, 2003: 7, quoting Goodman, 1998), as do definitions that contain value judgments about its proper use within the development industry, e.g., ‘Capacity represents the potential for using resources effectively and maintaining gains in performance with gradually reduced levels of external support’ (LaFond and Brown, 2003: 7). Capacity has been defined with minimalist simplicity, e.g., ‘Capacity is [the] potential to perform’ (Horton et al., 2003: 18). It has been divided into “hard” capacities, such as ‘infrastructure, technology, [and] finances’ (p. 23), and “soft” capacities, such as ‘...human and organisational capacities, or social capital of the organisation, including such things as management knowledge and skills, ...organisational systems, ...and procedures for planning and evaluation’ (p. 163).

There is general agreement in much of the literature that capacity exists and is strengthened for a reason—i.e., it is for *something* (Fowler and Ubels, 2010: 18), either as a means or an end in itself. Baser and Morgan state that capacity is meant to be put to use, to ‘enable a human system to create value’ (2008: 3). The oft posed question ‘capacity for what?’ (Baser and Morgan, 2008: 31, Lopes and Theisohn, 2003: 25, OECD, 2006: 19) is generally met with the response:

“performance”, ultimately in support of positive change. Morgan elaborates on the concept of capacities for performance:

Capacity has to do with collective ability, i.e. that combination of attributes that enables a system to perform, deliver value, establish relationships and to renew itself. Or put another way, the abilities that allow systems—individuals, groups, organisations, groups of organisations—to be able to do something with some sort of intention and with some sort of effectiveness and at some sort of scale over time. (Morgan, 2006b: 7)

Baser and Morgan put forth a more *purposeful* or intentional definition of capacity-building, as ‘the process of enhancing, improving and unleashing capacity; it is a form of change which focuses on improvements’ (Baser and Morgan, 2008: 4). At the organizational level, capacity-building is meant to help organizations *improve* upon their capacities to do their work purposefully and effectively over time.

Capacity meanings for my dissertation

In my dissertation, I use the terms capacity-building and capacity-strengthening interchangeably to indicate intentional methodological attempts to strengthen capacities. I use the term “capacity development” to refer to on-going often-endogenous processes in which capacity actually changes. But although some level of capacity development is on-going and is unrelated to external interventions, I do assume capacity development to be the desired outcome, and therefore, the purpose of capacity-building. I do not eschew the use of the term capacity-building for two reasons. First, I understand the “building” metaphor from a constructivist, not a construction perspective. Second, the mainstream introduction of the concept of capacity development over the last five years in particular (e.g., see: Ubels et al., 2010, Pearson, 2011, OECD, 2006, Baser and Morgan, 2008), has done little to differentiate capacity development from capacity-building conceptually. Many funders use definitions of capacity development that refer to processes, strategies, and even methodologies by which development actors are strengthened, and how these capacities help actors set and achieve their development objectives (Pearson, 2011: 9). Capacity development has become a catchall term that conflates all capacity-related concepts into one, potentially masking the usefulness or lack thereof of capacity intervention. As such, I have attempted in my dissertation to use the term capacity development only when referring to actual development of capacities, and not to the intentional processes that are used to spur or stimulate their development. I also use the term “capacity development” in generic reference to the overall field, in line with most mainstream literature. I now summarize how I use different capacity related terms in my dissertation:

Capacity	– Collective abilities, understood as a combination of attributes that enables a system (understood as a coherent, yet fluctuating web of relations, and not a literal “system”) to perform, deliver value, establish relationships, and to renew itself. Put another way, the abilities that allow systems—individuals, groups, organisations, groups of organisations—to be able to do something with some sort of intention and with some sort of effectiveness and at some sort of scale over time. (Morgan, 2006b: 7)
Capacity development	– On-going often-endogenous processes in which capacity actually changes – Generic name for the overall field that includes all capacity terminology and meanings
Capacity building or capacity strengthening	– Intentional methodological attempts to enhance, improve, or unleash capacities (Baser and Morgan, 2008: 4).

2.1.2. *The non-linear nature of capacity development and social change in complex environments*¹

Development is not linear and predictable... [therefore, w]e can never know quite what will flow out of a development intervention. There will always be outcomes which had never been planned, detours from paths..., unexpected reactions and contradictory achievements... Our assumptions will always be inadequate, although of course they must be made, for they form the foundation of any intervention; but always with due caution. (Kaplan, 1999: 12)

Many authors have noted how dominant linear thinking and practice in development—although perhaps convenient for simplifying the world in planning processes—tend to see the world from the perspective of their own instruments (Bakewell and Garbutt, 2005, Earle, 2002, Kaplan, 1999, Reeler, 2007), and do not adequately consider the inherent complexity of most social change processes (Ortiz Aragón, 2010b: 36). Complexity theory sheds light on the futility of assuming the development interventions (including, but not limited to capacity-building) of any particular organization have more control over their intended ends than they actually do (Ramalingam and Jones, 2008, Mowles et al., 2008, Mowles, 2010, Land et al., 2009, Eyben et al., 2008, Burns et al., 2012). One of the basic premises of complexity theory for development is that the directions in which development is going are often ‘random and unplanned’ (Morgan, 1997: 6) and have little to do with where pre-set goals and well-planned development interventions might intend for it to go (Reeler, 2007, Kaplan, 1999). Cause and effect cannot be

¹ In this section, I provide a cursory introduction to complexity theory, solely for the purposes of orienting readers to problematic relationships between capacity development and social change. I provide a more detailed theoretical explanation of complexity in **section 2.2.1**.

predicted with any confidence because change emerges from multiple factors, many of which are unknowable (Flood, 1999, Eyben et al., 2008).

The complexity of social change has implications for development practice. A body of work argues for the need to learn how “to do” development differently by understanding the full complexity and non-linear nature of social change processes (Guijt, 2007: 20, Baser and Morgan, 2008: 125) and ‘the complex, emergent realities of the lives and livelihoods of poor people’ (Chambers, 2010: 36). Complexity renders causality inherently unknowable, and therefore, traditional planning and control in complex situations has limited utility (Baser and Morgan, 2008, Earl et al., 2001, Earle, 2002, Ramalingam and Jones, 2008). Conventional approaches to development, which are often project-focused, are based on linear, cause-effect models of change that do not adequately consider the emergence, flexibility, adaptability and innovation required to deal with complexity (Britton, 2005, Reeler, 2007).

Some capacity development literature carries a similar message of complexity, arguing that capacity development is an inherently unstable, complex and changing political process (Watson, 2006: 2). Capacity development is not linear but occurs in a distinctly more ‘messy fashion’ (Lusthaus et al., 1999: 15), which, therefore, requires different ways of managing and measuring (Morgan, 1997: 6). Land et al emphasize the need to *act differently*, based on what the concept of emergent capacity permits:

‘By changing the way we look at cause-and-effect relationships, emphasising possibilities and probabilities rather than predictable results, it also challenges many assumptions about the need for planning, detailed design and control. In the process, it questions the way external partners set about influencing local change processes. Specific capacity development outcomes cannot simply be engineered by the delivery of external inputs. Interventions need to be flexible and able to adapt to future, usually unforeseeable, system behaviour’ (Land et al., 2009: 3).

The European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) capacity development study mentioned in the introduction (Baser and Morgan, 2008, Land et al., 2009) made an important effort to better understand capacity development in complex environments. This empirical study built on earlier normative capacity development literature that had also highlighted the complex nature of capacity for development (James, 2001, Kaplan, 1999, Lusthaus et al., 1999, Morgan, 1997). Some of the “soft” capacities noted earlier were further classified as “intangible”, which highlighted the importance of an organisation’s ‘ability to function as a resilient, strategic and autonomous entity’ (Kaplan, 1999: 20), as well as having the *capabilities* to commit and engage, adapt and self-renew, relate and attract, and balance diversity and coherence (Baser and Morgan, 2008, Morgan, 2006b). As better understanding of

these relational, adaptive capacities emerges, capacity development is shifting ‘from a focus on implementing discrete projects aimed at skills enhancement or organisational strengthening, to addressing much broader societal and systemic challenges... in sometimes highly contested environments, characterised by uncertainty and insecurity’ (ECDPM, 2008: 2).

Yet, in spite of the non-linear nature of how capacities emerge, many authors have noted a continued prevalence of linear tendencies in capacity development (e.g.: Woodhill, 2010, Taylor and Clarke, 2008, Ortiz Aragón, 2012, Ortiz Aragón, 2010b, Land et al., 2009, Baser and Morgan, 2008). Baser and Morgan (2008: 49) note that current thinking about capacity issues has improved, in that it ‘gives more attention to context by relating any interventions, internal or external, to the history, structure and pattern of the context’. However, they find it is important to ‘emphasise the complexity and the paradoxes of many context-actor relationships that do not conform to a linear pattern of cause and effect’ (Baser and Morgan, 2008: 49). In addition, they note the “system blindness” of people everywhere, who see only parts of these systems at work and then make judgments about the whole;...see the present, but not the evolution or history of events that got things to the present;...misunderstand the nature of the relationships that shape system behaviour’ (Baser and Morgan 2008: 17). The more rational, linear, quasi-mechanical approaches to capacity development lose relevance because of these blind spots (Baser and Morgan 2008: 17). Also, Morgan, referring to the design of capacity development indicators, notes that the oversimplification caused by ‘mechanical and linear notions [of capacity development] so attractive to engineers, auditors and economists produce[s] little insight into the human behavioural aspects to do with learning, attitudes and values or organisational change’ (1997: 12).

Many of these capacity-building approaches are implicitly based on the ‘organization as a machine’ metaphor (Morgan, 2006a)—rooted in classical management theory and scientific management—that focuses on ‘the idea that management is a process of planning, organization, command, coordination and control’, and ‘that organizations can or should be rational systems that operate in as an efficient manner as possible’ (Morgan, 2006a: 18, 22). However, an understanding of organizations as a rational, technical process tends to obscure the human, cultural and political aspects of organization, and overlooks the reality ‘that the tasks facing organizations are often much more complex, uncertain, and difficult than those that can be performed by most machines’ (p. 27).

2.1.3. *The subjective and contested nature of “good” social change*

Capacity and social change

Clarke and Oswald (2010: 3) in critically analyzing the origins and value of the term “capacity development” note that most literature looks at capacity development from either a technical, discourse, or an emancipatory lens. The *technical lens* asks the question: ‘how can policy and practice contribute more effectively to development goals?’ (Clarke and Oswald 2010: 3). This is asked within the policy debates on aid effectiveness and also at the practitioner level, where individuals and organizations that may or may not be aware of policy debates, are grappling with finding better technical means of approaching their work. The core assumption is that capacity-building is a value-free technical solution to a technical problem. The *discourse lens* focuses on how capacity development, like other development ‘buzzwords and fuzzwords’ (Cornwall and Eade, 2010, Eade, 2010), potentially masks a hidden agenda to impose external power interests and legitimize a new practice that simply recasts failed, traditional development in a new “capacity” light. Through this lens, one might look at the recent “Capacity *is* Development” campaign (UNDP, 2010), for example, as ‘a discourse concealing an agenda of power’ (Clarke and Oswald, 2010: 3). The *emancipatory lens* sees the legitimization of capacity-building insofar as it is in support of social justice and capacity as critical consciousness for action—an end in itself closely related to concepts of participation and empowerment (Clarke and Oswald 2010: 3). This lens includes a more structural view of capacity, including the ‘capacitation (sic) of donors, governments, and many development agencies to realign their *own* values, structures, and agendas to counteract asymmetries of power that exacerbate systemic poverty and powerlessness’ (Black, 2003: 118). The emancipation lens is supported by Eade’s contention that ‘the intellectual and political roots of capacity-building lie partly in the rights-centred *capacitación* of Liberation Theology and the *conscientização* work of Paulo Freire’, as well as the idea that capacity-building seeks to address the exclusion and unfreedoms that Sen’s work on entitlements and capabilities highlights (Eade, 2010: 205).

According to Clarke and Oswald, these views are not necessarily mutually exclusive, with each perspective having something important to contribute to a critical development practice. However, the predominant capacity development policy literature frames it as a value-free technical problem, which thus obscures issues of values and power (Clarke and Oswald, 2010: 4). This literature is well represented by the intentionally value-free Development Assistance Committee position discussed earlier: ‘Capacity is understood as the ability of people,

organisations and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully' (OECD, 2006: 13). The problem with this, however, is that "affairs management" is a contested endeavor that favors the status quo (Burrell and Morgan, 1979), the powerful over the weak, wealth over poverty, standardized over diverse (Chambers, 1993: 8), and things over people (Chambers, 2010: 11). As such, if capacity-building is to contribute to social change, it must be approached by considering not only the non-linear, complex nature of that change, but also problematizing the contested, uneven and socially unjust nature of that change. Indeed, these are important sources of its complex nature.

Guijt (2007: 13) notes that "social change" is also a neutral term, which if not qualified with terms like "developmental" or "people-centered," is open to being co-opted or used generically. Consider the following definitions of social change:

'Social change is a process of dialogue, debate and action resulting in major shifts in social norms, and is generally characterised by the highlighting and legitimization of discordant voices, particularly of those marginalised in society, and leading to improvements in their rights, entitlements and living conditions'. (Taylor et al., 2006: 15)

'Social change is a collective process of conscious efforts to reduce poverty and oppression by changing underlying unequal power relationships' (Guijt, 2007: 4)

The idea of *capacities for social change* (Taylor and Clarke, 2008, Ortiz Aragón, 2010b, Clarke and Oswald, 2010) encourages a very different worldview on capacity-building than the mainstream technical worldview. It implies the need for capacity-building to not only be thought of in relation to social change for purposes of "development effectiveness" or "performance", but as a process with an *explicit agenda* for social change that helps organizations think more critically about how they take their stand against unjust power structures and deal with problematic cultural and power relations. It implies helping organizations problematize the often contradictory relationships between the complex social change they are trying to affect outside their organizations (i.e., external conditions), and their internal complexity, structures, processes, programs, projects, power relations, culture, capacities, etc. These implications bring in the discourse and emancipatory lenses discussed by Clarke and Oswald that highlight 'the messy and political nature of capacity development' (Clark and Oswald 2010), and the *value-full* intention behind the idea of capacity-building *for social change*.

It is important to note that the two definitions of social change cited above may be fairly criticized for having an exclusively anthropocentric view of change that does not explicitly recognize the relationships between people and their natural environment. In fact, climate change, mining, water and other environmental issues and conflicts are sources of some of the most important social change issues of our time, many of which concern the lack of balance between human needs and environmental realities. My case organizations deal with difficult social issues in relation to the environment (Program for Democracy and Global Transformation (PDTG)), and the environment in relation to difficult social issues (Sirua). For my dissertation, I have drawn from the two definitions above and intentionally incorporated an environmental perspective²:

“Social change is a collective process of dialogue, debate and action to generate favorable life conditions and opportunities for all. Social change requires highlighting and legitimizing discordant voices and changing underlying unequal power relationships and social norms that sustain inequality, poverty and oppression. Social change must include equitable and rational use and care of natural resources, upon which all life depends.”

The important message remains the same: capacities are far from neutral in complex, contested “socio-environmental” change situations.

Underlying worldviews and theories of social change

Baser and Morgan (2008: 96) note that a main reason for failure of many capacity-building interventions is the assumption that technical and organizational processes can be addressed without examining governing mental models. However, even if individuals and organizations are not aware or do not make them explicit, development practice is clearly informed by mental models, worldviews, and theories of change (Eyben et al., 2008: 201), many of which are far from unique and are derived from approaches to change that have emerged in history, politics, sociology, and other areas of academic inquiry’ (Krzmaric, 2007: 45). Yet, practitioners may be unaware of the extent to which apparently “strategic” choices and debates regarding purposeful intervention for progressive social change are influenced by these theories of change: ‘Even when we do not realise it, we are using theories every day in explaining social reality to ourselves and to others’ (Eyben et al., 2008: 201).

² I am aware that even with this adjustment, this definition not adequately express strong conservationist worldviews, but rather continues to view environment solely in relation to human development. I believe a separate definition of “conservation and social change” needs to be developed in the future to address this imbalance.

According to Guijt (2007: 30, citing VeneKlasen, 2006), theories of change are ‘the overarching assumptions and philosophies that influence individual visions and understandings. They shape how each person thinks change occurs in society’ and are intrinsically linked to values, passions, and beliefs:

‘The theory of change that guides personal choices is philosophical, historical, political, psychological and experiential, i.e. ideological. It includes personal standpoints or worldviews based on class, ethnicity, belief systems, personal values, commitment, etc. It also includes the short and long term agenda and interest of those involved... in the process of social change’ (Guijt, 2007: 29).

Taylor and Clarke (2008: 16) note that different actors engaged in capacity development processes tend not to articulate their own theoretical understandings of how change happens. However, underlying these practices and theories of change are even deeper ways of seeing the world, including linear, heroic, managerialist, uncritical, pro-status quo (Burrell and Morgan, 1979), and other worldviews that may or may not be relevant in the best case, but may reproduce unhealthy hegemonic thought and practice in other cases (Moncrieffe, 2006: 35). In other words, linear and uncritical understandings of social change are not simply technical problems, but deeply rooted ‘ideologies, perceptions, practices and priorities’ (Chambers, 2005: 186) that influence the way development practitioners think about and conduct their work. As such, any process intended to find helpful relationships between capacity-building and social change in complex environments needs to give special attention to how worldviews and theories of change condition our ideas and practices for intervening in different development contexts (Ortiz Aragón, 2010b).

2.1.4. A focus on the methodological gap

In summary, much capacity-building has traditionally been seen as a technical approach to be applied in value free, uncontested, non-complex development situations. This is a view implicitly supported by dominant policy actors in the development industry, as evidenced by the ways in which these actors frame capacity issues (presented earlier). More recently, capacity-building literature has begun incorporating elements of complexity and systems theory to understand better how capacity actually develops (Land et al., 2009, Brinkerhoff and Morgan, 2010, Morgan, 2005b), including lessons learned on key conditions in place in successful attempts at capacity development in complex environments (Rademacher, 2005, Hauck, 2004, Baser and Morgan, 2008). Normative literature mostly based on practitioner experience has also offered important insights into capacity-building in complex environments (e.g., see: Taylor and

Clarke, 2008, Reeler, 2007, Ortiz and Taylor, 2009, Kaplan, 1999, Kaplan, 2000). However, if we as critical capacity-building facilitators are concerned with how to strengthen these capacities in complex environments, we are left with very little documented theory or practice from which to draw. How *does* one go about asking what a situation calls for and then purposefully try to act in a way that supports emerging opportunities, challenges and “change” in the most thoughtful and intentional way possible? How *can* we *act differently* and develop the capacity for changing the way we look at cause-and-effect relationships, predictable results, and detailed planning and control? (Land et al., 2009). Moreover, in contested, complex social change realities, how can we help organizations think more critically about how they take their stand against unjust power structures and how they deal with issues of culture and power relations that affect their ability to affect meaningful change? In other words, how can we go beyond strengthening organizations as a technical issue, to a focus on *critical capacity-building for social change in complex environments*? **Methodologically, how can we go about doing so?** Beyond broad principles, there is little to draw from in current capacity development literature to help address this issue.

A call for systems thinking

Morgan (2006: 7) states that capacity as state or condition is inherently a systems phenomenon that dynamically emerges from a complex combination of tangible and intangible attitudes, resources, strategies and skills in a particular context. The ECDPM study explicitly used an interpretive framework based on systems thinking which develops linkages between capacity and the idea of complex adaptive systems from complexity theory. The authors substantiate this choice on the idea that most capacity configurations (as complex human systems) cannot be well understood using conventional frames of thinking, such as detailed design, the charting of direct cause and effect relationships, planned change, and many others (Baser and Morgan, 2008: 21). This study is part of a small but growing body of literature that advocates for more use of systems thinking in organizational capacity development (Watson, 2010, Richter, 2010, Morgan, 2005b, Hosono et al., 2011, Datta et al., 2012). As systems thinking puts less faith in planning and intentionality, causation, attribution and results chains, it encourages people to think more creatively about the disorder, uncertainty and unpredictability common in messy development realities (Baser and Morgan, 2008: 124). As such, Baser and Morgan (2008: 126) note the need for capacity development research that utilizes systems and complexity ideas to help explore ‘deeper patterns of behaviour and relationships that lie beneath individual events and actions’ and make systems thinking operational for development cooperation.

My research answers the ECDPM call to explore systems thinking for capacity development, which I now explain in more detail.

2.2. Research questions and conceptual framework

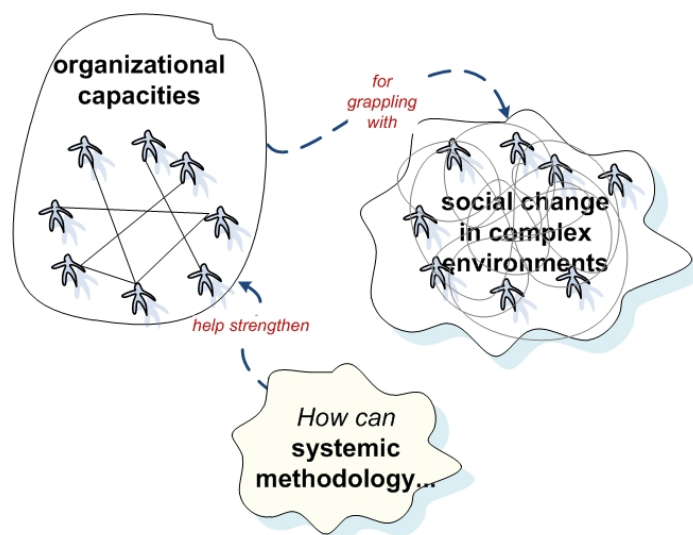
Based on the gaps in the existing literature regarding critical capacity-building methodology relevant in complex social change environments, I pose the following research questions:

How can systemic methodology help strengthen organizational capacities for grappling with social change in complex environments?

- 1) What methodological principles are relevant for strengthening organizational capacity in complex social change environments?
- 2) How can systemic methodology be helpful in this endeavour?
- 3) How does the complexity of specific organizational change realities affect the selection and effectiveness (i.e., relevance) of the capacity strengthening methodologies used?

The overarching research question is also presented as a diagram in **Figure 1** to highlight relationships between three key areas of literature: complexity theory, capacity development (outcome focus), and systemic methodological theory.

Figure 1—Conceptual framework



I now explain each of the three elements of the conceptual framework in more detail.

2.2.1. Complexity—How change emerges through complex responsive processes of human interaction and power relating

2.2.1.1. Introduction

Complexity theory draws from a broad set of concepts, principles and propositions that hail from biology, mathematics, physics, systems thinking, and more recently, social sciences (Ramalingam and Jones, 2008, Stacey, 2007). At a basic level, a complex situation can be thought of as any situation in which multiple actors, with multiple motivations and perceptions, combine with an unknowable mix of factors to affect how change occurs (Flood, 1988). In these situations, change *emerges* and is not caused, predictable or controllable by any particular actor, including “organizations” and their interventions (Burns, 2007, Checkland, 1981, 1993, Flood, 1999, Midgley, 2000, Snowden and Boone, 2007, Stacey, 2007). The idea of non-linear change emerging from multiple factors arises from traditions such as systems thinking (von Bertalanffy, 1968, Checkland, 1981, 1993, Churchman, 1979, Flood, 1988), organization development and strategy (Snowden and Boone, 2007, Jackson, 2003, Mintzberg and Waters, 1985, Morgan, 2006a, Mintzberg et al., 1998, 2009), and more recently, in development studies (Burns, 2007, Chambers, 1997, Chambers, 2010, Ramalingam and Jones, 2008) and capacity development (Baser and Morgan, 2008, Kaplan, 1999, Land et al., 2009, Morgan, 2005b, Taylor and Clarke, 2008). What complexity theories add that these other bodies of emergent change theory do not is a more detailed study and understanding of how *patterns* emerge in seemingly chaotic interactions, and how these patterns are not caused by any actor in particular, but rather, “self-organize” from multiple interactions (Tsoukas, 1998, Stacey et al., 2000, Stacey, 2007, Capra, 1996, Burnes, 2005). Complexity theories also focus on how the dynamics of interaction at a micro level generate conditions that support or prevent changes in patterns of interaction at broader levels (Capra, 1996, Prigogine et al., 1984).

In my dissertation I draw on a particular interpretation of complexity theory called “Complex Responsive Processes” (CRP) (Stacey, 2007, Stacey et al., 2000), which theorizes how complexity is generated through local *communicative* interaction between socially conditioned (but not determined) people with differing levels of power. Due to the difficult nature of some complexity concepts and terminology (Burnes, 2005: 77), I have chosen to explain key elements of complexity theory via a fictitious example of a socio-environmental challenge that I have written for this dissertation. Although it is fictitious (using a made-up organization “Mining Alert”), it is based on the work of one of my two case organizations—The Program for Democracy and Global Transformation (PDTG). After presenting the fictitious case, I then

interpret the example using CRP theory. I intend for this example to be relevant for understanding CRP implications for both cases in my dissertation. I do not delve further into other complexity theories because I feel CRP adequately considers key complexity concepts.

2.2.1.2. Background of the fictitious organization “Mining Alert”

Mining Alert (M-A) is an NGO that actively participates in social movements (with other local, regional and national Peruvian organizations), primarily in support of the rights of communities that live in areas of large-scale extractive mining in Perú. M-A helps organize protests, publishes accounts of community struggles, and strengthens the capacities of key organizations working within social movements. The capacity-building work is done by M-A’s programmatic area “Fortalece”, whereas the programmatic area “Relata” does the publishing work.

2.2.1.3. A complex reality

The nature of Mining Alert’s work is complex in that it has many moving pieces, with many actors and factors coming to bear on whether things M-A cares about and supports actually come to fruition. For example, M-A cares about supporting communities affected by large-scale mining projects in Perú to be able to organize and defend their rights, including protecting water supplies that descend contaminated from mine sites. Multinational companies run these projects, which are protected by the Peruvian military, local governments (including local governments that have relocated their municipal offices to mining company compounds), and private security units that “protect” the national government and multinational company legal rights to extract gold and other precious minerals in the name of national economic growth. Water contamination is only one source of conflict; large-scale mining generates many side effects, including prostitution, violence, and division between those community members who do and those who do not benefit from the mines. In support of affected communities, M-A participates in protests as part of broader social movements that challenge the extractive model of development and its multiple consequences, as well as in specific protests as conflicts erupt. They also conduct capacity strengthening activities with CONACAMI (The National Confederation of Peruvian Communities Affected by Mining), an important and highly visible organization within a broader social movement.

Thus, M-A cares about how large-scale extractive mining affects real communities and it desires to see CONACAMI play a prominent and effective role in raising consciousness and popular support through social movement to help current and future communities that might be affected by extractive mining. M-A’s “Fortalece” programmatic area conducts capacity strengthening

activities related to CONACAMI's management structure, leadership practices (a leadership school), and broader political and organizational themes that fit within M-A concepts of "accompaniment" and "capacity-building". M-A's "Relata" programmatic area has edited and published an important book of essays on the effects of mining on communities, and community resistance to mining (see de Echave et al., 2009), as well as a more didactic cartoon booklet called "Of Course, it's *Our* Territory" (López, 2009). But how do these publications and capacity strengthening activities of CONACAMI make a difference in the lives of community members affected by mining? How do they support change even at the level of CONACAMI behaviors (including the individuals within) or of readers of M-A publications?

By simply observing M-A's work priorities (as contained in this example), I can infer a theory of change that believes that pressure from social movements (e.g., protests, mobilizing actors and opinions), strengthening and enabling other actors that participate in social movements, application of strong political pressure from specific organizations, such as CONACAMI, and documentation and dissemination of the effects of mining and resistance to that mining, can lead to social change. However, national government actors, large multinational corporations, community members in favor of mining, multiple business interests that feed off the mining "value chain", and other actors all come to bear on the patterns of social stability or change that actually emerge. Peruvian public opinion on the merits of mining and the progressiveness or backwardness of indigenous communities affected by mining also plays a role in what happens—e.g., the mining-affected city of Cajamarca may be on fire but many people in Lima may be unaware or unconcerned, thereby providing no pressure on powerful actors to change. Moreover, millions of people purchasing gold or gold products as individuals or as representatives of companies and industries, as well as foreign governments that support their companies' economic interests all come to bear as well, even if the direct effect is unknown or subtle.

As an additional layer to consider, M-A consists of people who have assembled themselves into an "organization" charged with supporting the movements and changes described above. Organizations, as social settings, are essentially emergent patterns of interaction between interdependent persons (Stacey, 2007: 286). An organization is a reified social collectivity that is 'essentially a conversational process in which the world is interpreted in a particular way which legitimates shared actions and establishes shared norms and standards' (Checkland and Holwell, 1998b: 71). The dominant patterns or tendencies in this communication *constrain* and

enable movement into the future (Shaw, 2002). These “*enabling-constraints*”³ exist as communicational power relations that enable some ideas and actions and constrain others. The settings in which “organizations” explore change can be more constraining than enabling (Shaw, 2002: 45), in part because no singular, collective understanding exists of the organization, its contexts and aims, but rather multiple understandings exist based on the interests and agendas of individuals, sub-groups, as well as overall “official” accounts of the organization (Checkland and Holwell, 1998b: 83). In M-A the existence of different interests and agendas has led to tension and staff leaving due to disagreements on whether M-A should remain a militant collective or become a mainstream NGO. These different interests and agendas have also led to complaints about poor quality of work, lack of dedication, focus on individual causes, and problematic power relationships in general. In this situation, even if the groupings of people in M-A could navigate accommodations between conflicting interests and promote coherent collective “organizational” action (Checkland and Holwell 1998b: 83), the challenge would remain: *How can M-A strengthen key actors in social movements to support real change in a context in which most things are outside of their control? How do publications support this effort in a meaningful way?* I now unpack this example using CRP theory.

2.2.1.4. Change and complex responsive processes of human interaction

Patterns of activity emerge through self-organization (i.e. local interaction)

The situation described is a dynamic state in which communities are experiencing many negative effects due to mining, and also some positive effects—to the extent the mining endeavor economically favors some community members. Mining companies are benefitting, as is the Peruvian government, due to tax royalties, even as both actors “suffer” the wider consequences of mining, particularly in the form of social pressure. Individuals and organizations that participate in social movements are on alert in this situation, and in some cases are actively protesting and even impeding progress in some mines. However, at a national level, gold continues to be extracted at a consistent enough level to make it worthwhile for the government and mining companies; communities continue to suffer and benefit from the extractive processes; multiple actors continue to *enable* and benefit from mining; and multiple other actors, including M-A, continue to challenge and *constrain* mining in different ways. A complex pattern of activity exists, even as the pattern fluctuates.

³ Note: the term “enabling-constraints” will be used throughout the dissertation. Enabling-constraints are communicational power relations that enable some ideas and actions and constrain others, thus, affecting how change or movement into the future occurs.

The concept “*complex adaptive system*” has been used by analogy from the complexity sciences to describe such a situation. The basic idea is that the overall pattern of activity described above ‘emerges in the interplay’ of the desires, intentions and actions of *all* of the individual persons and groupings of people in this social setting and is not controlled nor predictable by any actor in particular (Stacey, 2007: 303). Different actors in this scenario may indeed be planning and acting with willful intent, in expectation of realizing future outcomes desirable to them (as many in the example above are doing), while others may simply be concerned with “getting things done” in their day-to-day lives. Additionally, different actors clearly have more power and resources to support their desires and actions than do others. However, as Stacey notes, since different actors have different desires and intentions, as well as different levels of resources, ‘the interplay of intentions is essentially a conflictual process in the sense of ongoing exploration and negotiation, taking the form of co-operation or manipulation, and sometimes hostility, aggression, competition, revolution or war’ (Stacey 2007: 303). In the ongoing exploration and negotiation in this case, *none* of these actors has control over the intentions, desires and actions of *all* the other actors that come to bear on the situation. As such, no one actor can control the pattern of activity that emerges, nor can any plan or blueprint predict that outcome. Patterns of activity in this complex environment emerge via the conflictual interplay of desires, intentions and actions of the multiple actors involved—each with differing levels of symbolic and material resources—and no one actor in particular can be in control of or even fully understand that interplay (Flood, 1999, Stacey, 2007).

Another way of thinking about this is by imagining that the overall or “*population-wide pattern (PWP)*” of activity in this complex adaptive system “*self organizes*” as a result of the multiple local interactions between people who are all guided by their desires and intentions. Mining companies pursue their interests, make investments, hire local workers, pay and coordinate security staff, and maintain the support of government actors. Some community members may protest while others collaborate. Violence may erupt (as it has very frequently this year (2012), for example) between community organizations and police or security forces. COCACAMI may mobilize many more actors in support of the victims of violence, and the government may do the same in support of police victims, or to paint protest as domestic terrorism, by using its influence in mainstream media. M-A may reflect and plan with CONACAMI on how to organize its response, or may use its networks of contacts and publishing skills to disseminate alternative accounts of what is happening on the ground (accounts not covered by mainstream media). Meanwhile, consistent amounts of gold may continue to be extracted in mines less-impeded by the effects of social protest. The complex adaptive pattern that exists at any given

moment dynamically emerges in a “*nonlinear*” manner out of all of these interactions (even as some local interactions may be of the linear, cause and effect variety). It is non-linear because the patterns that emerge are not easily traceable to specific causal factors, but instead are the result of many intended and unintended consequences of multiple interactions—i.e., no linear, cause and effect path exists to complex patterns of interaction. Self-organization does not mean that people are consciously self-organizing into a system of activity, but that when they engage in local interaction according to their own interests and motivations, a pattern of activity (an “*attractor*” in complexity theory) emerges from the interactions of all of those involved (Stacey et al., 2000: 106). The pattern self-organizes in a nonlinear manner because of multiple local interactions of people pursuing their desires and interests. Indeed, true social movements can be thought of as self-organizing complex adaptive systems in this manner.

Edge of chaos and change

Stacey developed CRP theory by first looking for ideas from within the mathematical complexity sciences that may be related, by analogy, to human behavior. He noted that many bodies of complexity theory have been transferred by metaphor to human situations without giving any serious thought to the compatibility of that theory with human action. For example, the theory of complex adaptive systems was generated in the laboratory through computer generated algorithms simulating how digital agents generate complex behavior when following simple programmed rules. An example is the pattern that emerges when computer simulated agents (called “Boids”) each: 1) maintain minimum distance from objects in the environment, including other boids, 2) match velocity with other boids in the vicinity, and 3) move towards the perceived center of mass of the boids in the vicinity (Stacey, 2007: 200). When each digital agent follows these three simple rules, a pattern very similar to that of flocking birds emerges, even though none of the agents intends to generate that pattern (they are just following rules and the pattern emerges). According to Stacey, management writers have used this thinking to prescribe the idea that by setting simple rules in an organization, a somewhat managed, innovative pattern of change can be created. What these writers ignore is that the oft-cited boids experiment is comprised of *homogenous agents* whose three simple rules behavior does not truly emerge, but is programmed from the outside and caused by *deterministic* non-linear equations. Homogenous agents programmed from the outside have no capacity for creativity or innovation—i.e., the flocking pattern is the only pattern possible, unless the programmer changes the rules (Stacey, 2007: 200-1). These models cannot explain novelty, or change, because they are deterministic and have no freedom of choice (Stacey 2007: 254). As such, they are not very useful as analogies for human action because humans have some degree of free

will; they are not boids after all. Models of actors “following the rules” leave no room for changes to new patterns of activity. Organizations using this idea as guide to action would be stuck in non-creative patterns of activity because spontaneous, creative action that varies from the norm is not possible (Stacey 2007: 254).

Given that Stacey (and my research) was concerned with *change* in population-wide patterns of interaction consisting of real humans, and not programmed deterministic behavior, the complex adaptive systems theory described above was not helpful. Instead, Stacey turned to the theory of complex adaptive systems consisting of *heterogeneous* agents, because in laboratory experiments, these models displayed the ability to change spontaneously from one attractor (i.e., population-wide pattern) to another in ways the programmer did not control. In an experiment known as the “Tierra simulation” (Ray, 1992), instead of boids, agents were comprised of algorithms containing 80 different ways in which they could copy themselves, depending on how they came into interaction with other agents in the simulation (Stacey, 2007: 255). The goal of the “game” is for each algorithm to copy itself as many times as possible, but each time it does, the new copy is programmed to slightly mutate from the original 80-programmed options. This random mutation function introduces diversity into the game. Constraints, in the form of total limited computer memory available and limited time available for replicating, are placed on agents as they try to copy themselves. When the simulation is run, a population-wide pattern (attractor) rapidly emerges as an increase in agents, which due to their large number, begin to crowd the memory, and thus, impose a constraint to further replication. As each agent’s algorithm is also changing due to random mutation, agents become more and more diverse, and eventually, a new attractor appears with some agents having mutated into algorithms of only 40 instructions. The constraints on computer resources favor smaller algorithms and the pattern that spontaneously emerges is a new attractor tending towards agents with smaller algorithms.

Complex systems display overall patterns of movement that might look like chaotic or random behavior, but when examined more closely, display coherent patterns and movement with a regular degree of irregularity, or stable instability (Stacey, 2007: 183). The phenomenon used to explain the spontaneous change from one attractor to another while maintaining pattern integrity is referred to as “*the edge of chaos*” in complexity theory. Edge of chaos displays paradoxical dynamics of stability and instability at the same time. This phenomenon emerges when the agents are numerous, richly connected to each other, and have constraints that generate conflict and control (Stacey 2007: 199). In the Tierra example the agents pursue a growth strategy by copying themselves, which puts them into conflict with each other for use of overall computer

memory and time. However, the mutation function introduces diversity into the system that generates another class of agents that survive by becoming smaller and more efficient. Although constraints keep the system from spinning out of control, the system remains at high energy and settles into changing attractors that allow it to survive. An important lesson is that systems characterized by dynamics that combine order and disorder (i.e., which operate at the edge of chaos), are capable of evolving while those that are purely orderly or more stable cannot evolve: ‘At the edge of chaos, systems are capable of endless variety, novelty, surprise—in short, creativity’ (Stacey, 2007: 199). But perhaps the most important lesson—that what distinguishes the boids and the Tierra simulations—is that if no conflict or diversity is present, no source for change exists:

‘... evolving, coherent, population-wide patterns do emerge in local interaction between agents when those agents are richly connected to each other, so imposing *conflicting constraints* on each other, and when they differ sufficiently from each other, so displaying *diversity*. When these conditions are met, ...the patterns of movement over time... [may] take the form of regular irregularity (edge of chaos), which has the property of *amplifying small differences* into novel patterns (Stacey, 2007: 303-4).

Different attractors, including stable equilibrium and random chaos are possible in complexity theory (Stacey et al., 2000: 106). For this reason, many management writers have looked to generate analogies for edge of chaos as an alternative to the idea of patterns of “stuck” stable equilibrium or incoherent chaos that organizations experience (Stacey, 2007: 441). If plausible analogies could be found, these ideas could present a radical challenge to dominant ways about thinking of change in organizations, because complex systems operating far from equilibrium, as in the edge of chaos:

- Are unstable yet stable at the same time, challenging the idea that stability equals success
- Are radically unpredictable over time; although stable patterns emerge, no way of predicting what that pattern might be exists. Just as in the Mining Alert example above, change emerges in self-organizing local interaction, without any prior blueprint or plan
- Evolve only when the agents comprising them are diverse, and hence generate conflicting constraints (Stacey 2007: 183)

According to Stacey, most phenomena in nature and all living phenomena are held to be characterized by these paradoxical dynamics, a position also supported by Capra (1996). However, a way would need to found to apply this thinking plausibly to human activity and organizational life, by considering human ability for spontaneity and exercise of freewill (within limits). He found a useful analogy between heterogeneous agents in computer simulations and human interaction by drawing on Elias’ sociological research that showed how modern societies

emerged not out of some grand rational plan but out of multiple interactions and intentions of people in society:

'It is simple enough: plans and actions, the emotional and rational impulses of individual people, constantly interweave in a friendly or hostile way. This basic tissue resulting from many single plans and actions of men can give rise to changes and patterns that no individual person has planned or created. From this interdependence of people arises an order sui generis, an order more compelling and stronger than the will and reason of the individual people composing it...' (Elias, 2000: 366, in Stacey, 2007: 248).

In Elias' theory, society is created by the interplay of intentions and interactions of many people. Through their friendly or hostile interaction, patterns emerge in the form of social order. However, he rejected the structural functionalist idea of society as a deterministic real system outside of the dynamic interaction of people, and did not see either individuals or society as existing first and then affecting the other. Rather, he focused on how social order and change in civilization over time emerge in interactions between people (Stacey, 2007: 247). According to Stacey (2007: 248), although Elias was unlikely ever aware of the complexity sciences, his sociological theory was essentially describing complexity concepts of self-organization, emergence and population-wide patterns, or attractors. Stacey (2007: 257) found other similarities as well and then proposed 'that the abstract, non-linear, iterative relationships of heterogeneous complexity models are analogous to the interactive processes of social evolution proposed by Elias'. However, he clarified that the examples cannot be transferred wholesale because no analogies exist between the programmer in CAS and anything in human interaction, nor is there an analogy for the "whole system" as in CAS (which would be a deterministic structural functionalist notion). He developed CRP theory after making the following additional adjustments and/or clarifications (adapted from Stacey 2007: 259):

	CAS from computer simulations	Complex responsive processes
<i>Who interacts?</i>	Digital, locally interacting agents (algorithms) that self-organize	People interacting locally (self-organization) via complex responsive processes of human relating through symbols and gestures
<i>What emerges?</i>	Adaptive agents and population-wide pattern emerge at the same time, in visual mathematical models	Population-wide patterns emerge as dominant themes in communicative interaction
<i>What is the attractor?</i>	An overall or “population-wide pattern,” which can spontaneously change at the edge of chaos	A population-wide pattern, such as a routine, habit, or some other generalization or idealization, such as a social object or cult value (explained later) that must be made operational in local interaction
<i>How does overall change occur?</i>	Novelty emerges at edge of chaos, spontaneously generated via replication and random mutations of agents interacting. <i>The actual pattern of change that emerges is radically unpredictable.</i>	Novelty emerges as the re-patterning of conversational themes in paradoxical processes of human interaction. This re-patterning may spontaneously emerge when diversity exists in human interaction that generates explorative conflict and deviance as sources of transformation. <i>The actual pattern of change that emerges is radically unpredictable.</i>
<i>Where are boundaries?</i>	Boundaries of system set by programmer	No literal overall system exists. Power relations and dynamics of inclusion and exclusion enable and constrain people’s intentions and local interactions. Population-wide patterns have no objectively definable boundaries.

Self-organization (i.e. local interaction) is communicational—i.e., local interaction is communicational power relating (enabling-constraints)

In CRP theory, complexity is generated through local “*communicative interaction*” (which emerges into self-organized patterns) between socially conditioned—but not determined—people with differing levels of power. The patterns of behavior in the mining example and within M-A are generated as the different actors express their desires and conduct their intentions via communicative processes. In other words, self-organizing population-wide patterns of behavior emerge from local *communicative* interaction between people in local communities, business, governmental actors, mining companies, and many other actors, including between individuals and groups within M-A and CONACAMI.

Returning to the example, community members may mobilize and present a demand to their local government in response to a specific outbreak of illness due to contaminated water. Perhaps a death is caused from the contamination, which results in extreme emotional responses amongst certain members of the community, who decide to initiate a protest blocking access to

the mine. M-A may convene an internal meeting to discuss its participation in the impending protest or may facilitate an exchange with CONACAMI on how to mobilize others. In these communications, some ideas may carry more weight than others as different participants hold and exercise different degrees of charisma, knowledge, social position, eloquence, moral authority, controlling behaviors, control over resources and opportunities, access to others, and other symbolic and tangible resources of power. These multiple local interactions by different actors, which in their unknowable totality, emerge into overall patterns of activity, are communicational (see **Box 1**).

Box 1—Communication in Complex Responsive processes

Communication in complex responsive processes is thought of as one body making a gesture to another body, which in turn, evokes further responses (Stacey, 2007: 271). In the back and forth gesturing, each body simultaneously interprets and constructs, shapes, enables, and constrains the meaning that dynamically emerges from the interaction. As such, meaning exists as part of a social act—i.e., on that which emerges in the back and forth of gesturing between bodies. As meaning emerges in conversation, people can sometimes anticipate or predict where a conversation is going, as well as shape where we would like it to go. To anticipate where conversation may be emerging requires the ability to interpret the meanings of the body language, sounds, inflections, and colors, etc. of the participants in the conversation. This ability involves taking the attitude of the other, including entering into the emotions expressed in a conversation (an extreme example of which could be shouting, but a myriad of more subtle, empathetic gestures exist as well—many of which are non-verbal) (Stacey 2007: 272). As such, gesturing processes are embodied, with our central nervous systems becoming central to understanding how we “know” anything (Stacey 2007: 273). Communication, therefore, includes the full range of gestures exchanged between bodies and which generate meaning.

CRP theory does not assume that power relationships permit equitable communication. I explore this in detail in Chapters 7 and 8 (8.2.5.)

Very similar implications for the organizational level occur as well—i.e., *within* M-A in this case—where ‘what an organization becomes emerges from the relationships of its members, rather than being determined by the choices of individuals’ (Stacey et al., 2000: 123). Just as the broader example is that of a complex social setting, M-A is also a social setting in which that which is considered “organizational” emerges as patterns of interaction between its interdependent members (Stacey, 2007: 286). Since this interaction is communicational, it is the act of complex gesturing—including but not limited to conversation—that ‘is the key process by which forms of organizing are dynamically sustained and changed’ (Shaw, 2002: 10). Whereas repetitive communication may block the emergence of innovative strategies, more fluid forms of communication may be more amenable to influencing organizational change (Stacey, 2007: 286). Disturbing repetitive patterns of communication so that new ones may emerge is therefore key for enabling organizational change (Shaw, 2002: 34). However, the precise outcome that

results from disturbing these patterns will emerge from the influences and intentions of all of the actors involved as they continually shape and shift the web of enabling-constraints in which they are enmeshed (Shaw 2002: 34). All actors are not motivated by a single, universally understood vision or a set of goals, but by their own interpretations of the options available and sensible to them in their evolving circumstances as they communicate (Shaw, 2002: 51). As such, only from within the emergent, changing flow of everyday communicative interaction can enabling-constraints be influenced so that new patterns of interaction may emerge. To enter the flow of ongoing communicative interaction (i.e., complex gesturing) is to enter the streams of organizational complexity. From within, significant shifts in conversations and other forms of communication may represent transformations in organizational patterns of activity, and therefore, organizational identity.

The quality of communicational life in organizations is thus paramount (Stacey, 2007: 445). However, in every conversation, people are informed by conscious or unconscious evaluative criteria, or appreciative settings (**see section 5.2.3**), which are historically constructed. These criteria or settings include one's understandings of the past, one's ongoing interpretation of current population wide patterns of activity (i.e., how we see and experience complexity "out there" and within the organization), one's desires for the future (including actual intentions and plans) and one's understanding of appropriate ways of interacting at any given moment (Stacey 2007: 434). In CRP, at the same time that population-wide pattern patterns emerge via local communicative interaction, those population-wide pattern are present in that very communication—i.e., complexity as we experience it is present in our communication, which in turn, generates complexity (see 4.4.3 for case examples). Another important implication is that the different way different people interpret reality and act, informed by these criteria, is an important source of diversity and explorative, or destructive, conflict in an organization. Both of these implications are part of a non-deterministic theory of social conditioning that is part of CRP, which will be further explored in the dissertation. For now, I simply emphasize that my analysis pays specific attention to the patterns of communication that emerged during the research and how CRP can help explain the extent to which these patterns shift in meaningful ways in different methodological moments.

2.2.1.5. Conclusion

If overall change emerges as explained by CRP, the need to think differently about how the strengthening of an actor like CONACAMI, or publishing of books chronicling the effects of mining and resistance to mining, becomes obvious. How can anything organizations do

contribute to patterns of change that make sense within their missions, when the way that change emerges is mostly outside of their control? In other words, how do local communicative action and patterns that emerge locally (including “organizations”), relate to population wide social patterns if they do not cause them linearly? In addition, how can we (those who do CB work) strengthen capacities in organizations to better grapple with the inherent complexities in these paradoxical relationships and support social change? These questions go to the heart of my dissertation, so I will not explore them in detail in this section. For now, when I say that complexity is *revealed, surfaced, generated or grappled with*, I am referring to examples in which participants:

- Share how they experience or interpret population-wide patterns of behavior—i.e., how they experience complexity
- Replicate complex behaviors that they experience within or outside of their organization
- Engage in, notice or bring attention to multiple interacting relationships, or draw out complex elements in a situation that may include conflicting elements and problematical power relationships.
- Make connections between internal, organizational patterns of activity (i.e., internal conditions) and broader population-wide patterns of activity (i.e., external conditions) related to the organization’s areas of concern
- Introduce new perspectives (from multiple cognitive states, including emotions and senses) that add new layers of understanding to a situation

2.2.2. Capacity development outcomes

My research attempted not only to help my case organizations grapple with complexity more effectively, but to develop capacities for doing so. As such, it is necessary to define ‘What is the difference between organizational change and capacity development?’ (Baser and Morgan, 2008: 52). To do so, a working definition of capacity development outcomes relevant in complex environments is needed. For my outcomes framework I draw heavily from the ECDPM study, cases and capabilities framework because it is one of the only sources of empirically-based capacity development literature concerning complexity, power relations, culture, and contested social change. According to that study, although no blueprints for capacity development exists due to its complex, nuanced and unpredictable nature, to a greater or lesser extent, some generic characteristics elements of capacity can be found in all organizations or systems (**see Figure 2**). I now present the five capabilities by paraphrasing and adapting from the following sources, which I will no longer cite in this section for practical reasons (ECDPM, 2008: 3, Brinkerhoff and Morgan, 2010: 3, Baser and Morgan, 2008: 26-35):

Capability to commit and engage (key words: volition, awareness, motivation, attitude, confidence):

This capability is fundamentally about inner motivation and volition of an organization to be a committed development actor “on a mission”—i.e., to be conscious and aware of its place in the world and to act based on inner motivation. It is placed in the center of the framework because it goes beyond conventional notions of ownership and focuses more on self-motivated attitude and self-perception—including how these may energize the other capabilities in important ways. Actors in the ECDMP case studies that developed this capacity overcame enormous constraints.

Figure 2—ECDPM capabilities



Some potential indicators of this capability are as follows:

- Has a high level of organizational awareness/purpose, optimism, energy and confidence to act that may express itself in a feeling of momentum or progress
- Does not feel helpless or trapped by conflict or complex circumstances
- Finds it important to create space and autonomy for independent action, including motivating unwilling or unresponsive partners
- Displays internal abilities to encourage mindfulness, to aspire and persevere, to embed conviction and to take ownership
- Displays energy to exercise other capabilities (e.g., plan, decide, engage collectively, and mobilize support, etc.)

Capability to conduct technical, service delivery and logistical tasks (key words: planning, programs and projects, services, program and financial management):

This capability refers to the ability of an organization to conduct its main technical or programmatic work legitimated by its mission, and generate results (i.e., public value) in doing so. This capability also concerns the manipulation of skills and resources towards “first-order” task accomplishment in operations, logistics and management. This capability represents the dominant instrumental capacity area found in much capacity development literature and donor requirements. However, although it is heavily criticized as being overly instrumental when made the sole focus of capacity development, it is indeed a fundamental capacity area—

organizations must be seen to be generating results in their area of focus over time. Without results in this area, it is impossible to justify more holistic capacity strengthening activities.

At the same time, it is important to differentiate this capability with the capability to commit and engage, which is more related to “second-order” change—i.e., a complex blend of motivation, power, space, legitimacy, confidence, security, meaning, values, and identity—which is connected to deeper patterns of partly structural, partly psychological, and usually deeply embedded behaviors.

Some potential indicators of this capability are as follows:

- Effectively and consistently conducts tasks and achieves outputs over time
- Produces acceptable levels of performance by generating substantive outcomes in sectoral or other area of focus, thus adding clear value for their clients, beneficiaries, citizens, etc.
- Has effective project and financial management systems to remain operational and accountable

Capability to relate (key words: relations, alliances, positioning, legitimacy, advocacy, networking and mobilization, networked power):

This capability refers to an imperative of all human systems, which is to relate and survive within its context and in connection with other actors. As such, capacity is not only about an organization “carrying out its work” but also about crafting, managing, and sustaining key relationships needed for the organization to deliver value and survive. Capacity in this sense exists not solely within the organization but as an emergent property of the quality of the relations it enters into, including how these relationships confer legitimacy, resources, secure operating space, and offer buffering from shocks from complex environments.

Some potential indicators of this capability are as follows:

- Earns trust and establishes and manages linkages, alliances, and/or partnerships with others to leverage resources and actions
- Builds legitimacy in the eyes of key stakeholders by virtue of the quality of the relationship the organization establishes with each of these actors
- Deals effectively with competition, politics, and power differentials and does not become overly dependent on or co-opted by the agenda of any particular actor

Capability to adapt and self-renew (key words: learning, sense-making, adaptation, repositioning, managing change, strategic thinking)

This capability relates to an organization's ability to make sense of the complexity that it works within, and continually adapt and re-emerge in ways relevant to that complexity. It also concerns finding ways to learn and remain relevant when complex, "wicked" patterns of behavior are resistant to simple solutions. This also includes systematic learning from experience and proactive study of internal or external trends, and factors that affect change over time.

Some potential indicators of this capability are as follows:

- Copes well with changing contexts and develops resiliency. Able to adapt and modify plans and operations based on monitoring of progress and outcomes
- Proactively anticipates change and new challenges based on learning and experience
- Repositions and reconfigures the organization as needed
- Improves both individual and organizational learning by fostering active internal dialogue, incorporating new ideas, and learning by doing and reflecting

Capability to balance diversity and coherence (balance, diversity, contradiction, tension, coherence):

This capability is about an organization's ability to manage tensions and contradictions, and to benefit from diversity and positive energy without losing coherence and focus. On the one hand, organizations need different capabilities, perspectives, interests, and identities to be able to be relevant in their complex environments in the first place—diversity in this sense helps build resilience. However, on the other hand, they need to ensure that focus is not lost, or even broken up as they tend to greater complexity, diversity and fragmentation. This is essentially a capacity to balance tradeoffs, including those related to the other capacities to encourage both innovation and stability. This capability is closely related to the complexity concept "edge of chaos".

Some potential indicators of this capability are as follows:

- Balances control, flexibility, and consistency
- Able to integrate and harmonize plans and actions in complex, multi-actor settings
- Copes well with cycles of stability and change
- Continually communicates and builds connections to make sense out of complexity
- Balances adaptive/emergent planning with long-term strategies and visions as needed

Final thoughts

The relative emphasis of these five capability areas will depend on the nature of specific organizational and contextual realities. Regardless of the mix, however, the overall capacity of an organization emerges through the interactions of all these elements, and ultimately, manifests itself in an organization's overall ability to support the creation of public value.

Note: In addition to the ECDPM framework, in my analysis chapters, I bring in other literature from the broader field of organizational development (OD) and learning that have heavily influenced capacity development thinking (Richter, 2010: 101).

2.2.3. *Soft systemic and critical systemic thinking*

'Systemic approaches are important because they tell us that the issues that we are engaged with are always enmeshed with other issues; that there are meta-level patterns and norms which affect these issues; that our assessment of them is often dependent on where we place the boundaries of what we view and that unintended consequences can emerge from the inter-relationships' (Burns, 2011: 13)

'The focus of systems thinking moves in a variety of different directions compared to the linear style of conventional thinking. It is more than lateral thinking. It is also vertical and horizontal and circular. Systems thinking pays much more attention to movement and dynamics. Systems thinking is oriented more towards capturing flow and movement. In particular, it focuses on processes, patterns and relationships. What matters more is understanding the effects of the interactions as opposed to detailed efforts to predict outcomes' (Morgan, 2005b: 4).

2.2.3.1. *Systems thinking background*

The emergence of systems thinking as a tradition is presented in detail in several well-cited books (see, for example: Midgley, 2000, Jackson, 2003, Jackson, 2000, Flood, 1999, Checkland, 1981, 1993, Capra, 1996). The main argument presented is that the complexity of real life problems of social interaction, which are in abundance today, and are what most threaten our organizations and societies, cannot be adequately explained by scientific reductionism, which isolates phenomena into parts (Jackson, 2000: 1), and mechanistic thinking, which assumes interaction between parts can be described as an objectively predicable, functional machine (Midgley, 2000: 2). The complexity of real life is better understood by looking at phenomena in relation to each other and to their contexts, and by intervening in ways that do not assume machine-like cause and effect logic. Returning to my example in the introduction, if the challenge at hand is to try to understand how to reduce community participation in illegal logging, systems thinking would posit that the issue needs to be reviewed holistically, not atomically. A non-systemic approach might entail going to the

source of the logging, in this case community members, and working exclusively on changing their behavior, perhaps through a mix of education, incentives, and sanctions. This approach, however, would fail to consider multiple economic, social, and cultural factors that actively enable woodcutting as a viable process for community members. Capra explains that the Greek meaning of the word system or “synhistanai” is to place together, ‘so to understand things systemically literally means to put them into a context, *to establish the nature of their relationships*’ (Capra, 1996: 27, italics added). This is because complex realities involve richly interconnected actors and issues, in which overall behaviors emerge from these multiple interactions, and cannot be understood by isolating or reducing individual “parts” of the interaction. These behaviors or outcomes, whether positive or negative, will often have more to do with the interrelationships between interacting interventions than the effect of any individual action (Burns, 2007: 21). A systemic response to the woodcutting problem would therefore try to look at the issues in an interrelated way, from macro and micro perspectives, and would intervene in ways that assume multiple unknowable and uncontrollable characteristics of the situation exist (Flood, 1999).

2.2.3.2. Soft systems thinking and methodology

Hard systems thinking

Many ways of thinking holistically exist, as do many different systems traditions both for studying systems and for intervening in complex realities. These include traditions, such as Socio-technical Systems Theory, Systems Dynamics and Organizational Cybernetics, amongst many others. Some of these traditions have unwittingly inherited mechanistic assumptions (Midgley, 2000: 4), including the belief that complex webs of human interaction can be thought of as literal, deterministic systems and subsystems that can be predicted and controlled. Of particular relevance to my research is the emergence of Soft Systems Thinking (SST) and Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) as a reaction to the inability of Hard Systems Thinking to provide relevant assumptions and techniques for intervening in complex realities.

According to Checkland (1985: 759), Hard Systems Thinking, and indeed, a new interest in systems thinking in general, emerged after WWII ‘when lessons from military operations were being applied to industrial companies and government agencies’ (p. 759). To apply systems thinking to “human systems” (i.e., systems mostly comprised of real humans interacting with each other coherently to generate some outcome), assumptions had to be made regarding the nature of “human systems”, which could then be engineered to conduct specific purposes

effectively. The main assumption adopted was that any human activity could be regarded as a goal-seeking system, and systems ideas could be applied by: a) defining the system of concern, b) defining the system's objectives, and c) engineering the system to meet those objectives (Checkland 1985: 759). The nature of Hard Systems Thinking that emerged can be summarized as follows (Checkland 1985: 765):

- It seeks to make possible the efficient achievement of goals or objectives, taking goal-seeking to be an adequate model of human behavior
- It assumes that the world contains real (i.e., objectively definable) systems that can be "engineered"; hence, that models of those systems can be made
- It talks the language of "problems", and "solutions" which eliminate problems

Hard Systems Thinking was mostly developed in the field of operational research and systems engineering, and indeed, Checkland worked as a manager in the chemical industry for several years, and later as a professor in a systems engineering department and Lancaster University. In his work he was often tasked with seeking ways of using systems engineering concepts in real-world problem situations. He describes the challenges he and his colleagues faced in this endeavor:

'[T]he management situations we worked in were always too complex for straightforward application of the systems engineering approach. The difficulty of answering such apparently simple questions as: "What is the system we are concerned with?" and "What are its objectives?" was usually a reason why the situation in question had come to be regarded as problematical [in the first place]. We had to accept that in the complexity of human affairs the unequivocal pursuit of objectives which can be taken as given is very much the occasional special case; it is certainly not the norm' (Checkland, 2000: S14).

This realization caused him to abandon classic systems engineering methodology and find new ontological and epistemological assumptions that would be more relevant in the complex realities in which he worked.

The soft systems thinking paradigm shift

'The world is taken to be very complex, problematical, mysterious. However, our coping with it, the process of inquiry into it, it is assumed, can itself be organised as a learning system' (Checkland 2000: S17).

The break with hard systems engineering was not a dismissal of the value of systems engineering, which has powerful techniques for applying to well-defined, albeit difficult technical problems, such as designing inventory systems, constructing buildings or bridges, or designing a sewage system or water treatment plant (e.g. what Snowden and Boone, 2007,

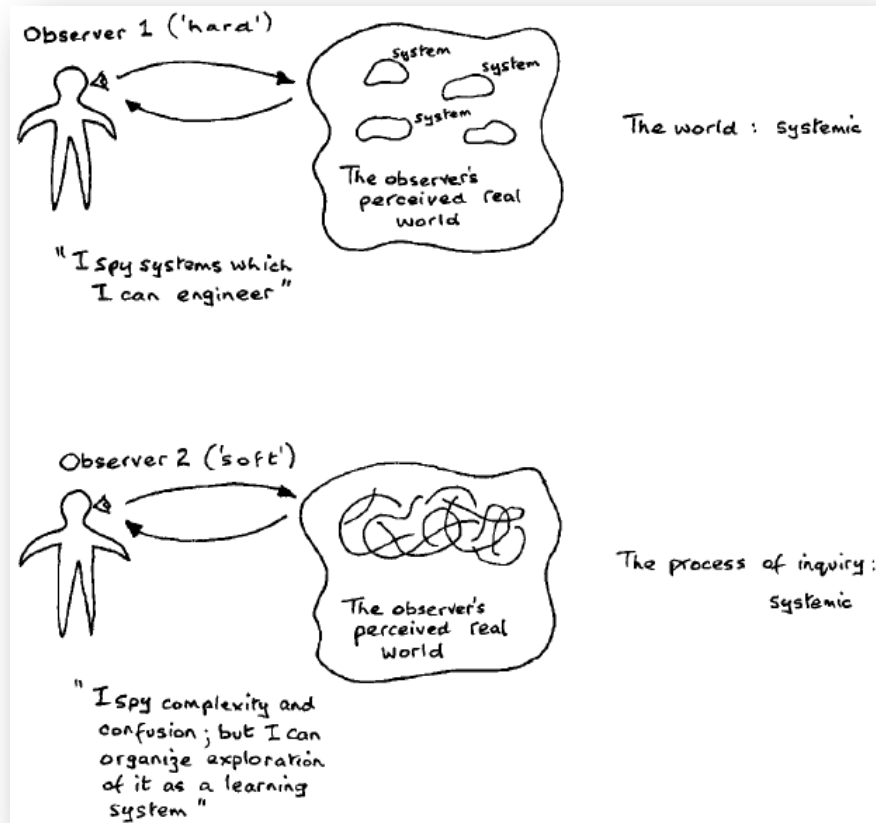
would refer to as "complicated" situations). However, a new way of intervening was needed in the fuzzy, ill-defined situations involving human beings and human culture that Checkland was facing (Checkland, 2000: S17).

Returning to the idea of social change, consider how hard and Soft Systems Thinking concepts might be related to the following situations: *“What should be done to address the predicaments of street children in Lima, Perú? What should be done to conserve areas of high biodiversity and poverty in Ecuador? How can education of girls in conservative regions of Afghanistan be approached?”* These situations are not buildings or bridges to be built. Each of these problematic situations might have multiple stakeholders, none of whom exactly agree on the nature of the problem, or on what might constitute a meaningful response.

Checkland (1981, 1993: 316) distinguished “human” systems that often have ill-defined “soft” problems that cannot be defined in simple means-ends language, because defining the ends, goals, purposes is in itself problematic. With soft problems any given stakeholder might have a different interpretation of the same problem. Soft problems are typical in the complexity of “messy” human development and require interventions, processes and systems that match the uncertainty and complexity of social change—i.e., that do not attempt to force predetermined, simplistic, causal solutions on complex realities. However, although HST is appropriate in well-defined technical problems and SST is more appropriate in fuzzy ill-defined situations more common in human systems, the main difference between the two is SST’s complete ontological shift in the understanding of what a system is, as expressed in **Figure 3** (reproduced from Checkland, 2000).

The soft systems thinker sees a complex and confusing world with many relationships, but does not assume that this world is full of real, objectively definable systems that can be engineered. Instead, the value of systems thinking is placed in developing systems as ways of exploring complex realities—i.e., as learning devices that generate good questions to ask of complex situations. *SST is most useful for learning about complexity in order to be able to take sensible, purposeful action, not for attempting to objectively know or control complexity.*

Figure 3—Checkland's hard and soft systems stances



Key SST principles are as follows (paraphrased from Checkland, 1985, except where cited below):

- Does not assume the world contains real systems that can be engineered, but complex webs of relationships—many of which are problematical—that can be explored by using systems thinking and systems models. As such, emphasizes that systems diagrams and models are intellectual constructs or learning devices, not ontological representations of the real world
- Is oriented towards learning over goal seeking (e.g., asking better questions of complex situations, rather than pursuing black and white goals). In this sense, it does not seek to produce final answers and accepts that inquiry is never ending.
 - o Does not regard goal seeking as an adequate model for much of what goes on in human affairs. Instead it assumes much of human behavior is explained by relationship-seeking and maintenance.
- Instead of thinking in terms of problems and solutions, it thinks in terms of situations, learning and accommodations (i.e., agreements to make changes, rather than consensus)

- A key source of complexity in human affairs stems from the fact that problematical situations are dynamic (i.e., changing) and contain multiple interacting (sometimes clashing) perceptions of reality, as different people have different assumptions about the world (Checkland and Poulter, 2006: xv-xvi). As such, part of what makes situations “soft” is this difference in subjective perceptions about “what is”. Addressing challenges in complex realities therefore ‘has to pitch analysis at a level that allows worldviews to be surfaced and examined’ (Checkland and Poulter 2006: xv–xvi).

For Checkland, the concept of worldview is the most important concept in understanding the complexity of human systems (Checkland and Poulter, 2006: 6). This concept became a primary focus of SST because of the possibility that shifts in worldviews might promote second-order learning (Jackson, 2003: 10), as multiple values, beliefs and interests that generate complexity became the subject of analysis.

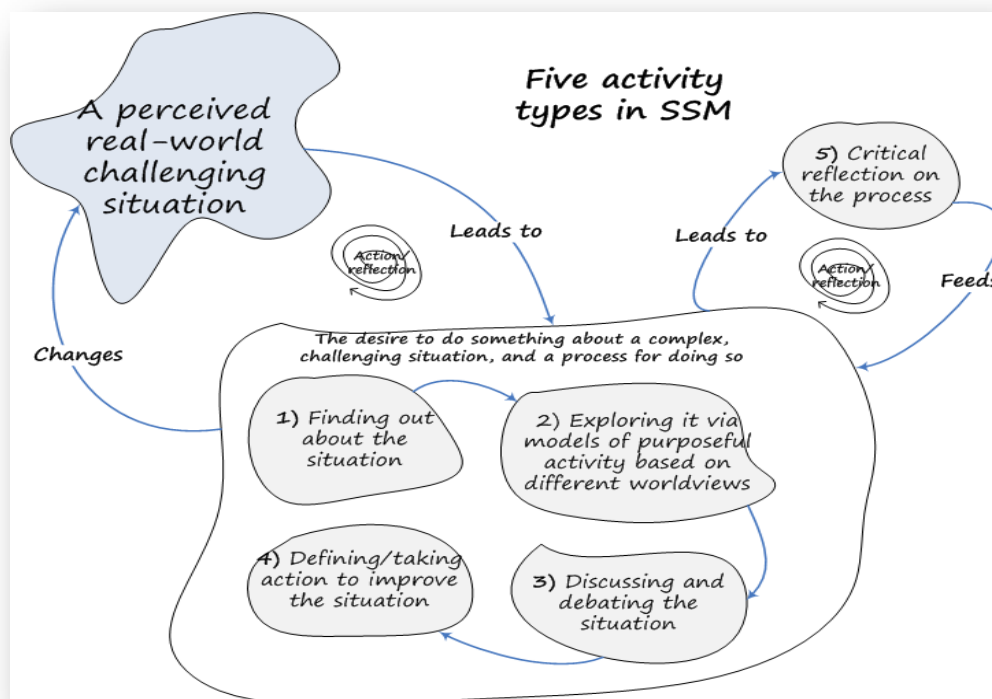
Soft systems methodology (SSM)

Based on the SST ideas above, Checkland developed Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) for dealing with complex management problems (management defined broadly). SSM is a specific application of SST. Checkland and Poulter (2006: 60-63) explain SSM as seven principles (a-g below) that correspond to five types of actions (see **Figure 4**). I summarize their explanation below by drawing heavily from their original explanations. The numbers referenced in a-g correspond to the numbers, 1–5, in figure 4:

- a) SSM is for use in “real world” *problematical* (i.e., challenging) *situations*; that is to say, a real situation that someone thinks needs attention and action.
- b) All thinking and talking about problematical situations will be conditioned by the *worldviews*...of the people doing the thinking and talking. These worldviews are the internalized taken-as-given assumptions that condition us to see and interpret the world in a particular way (e.g., one observer’s terrorism being another’s “freedom fighting”)
- c) Every real-world problematical situation will contain people trying to act purposefully, with intent. This means that *models of purposeful activity* (2), in the form of systems models built to express a particular worldview [of what a system *ought to do*] can be used as *devices* to explore the qualities and characteristics of any problematical human situation.
- d) *Discussion and debate* (3) about such a situation can be *structured* by using the models in (2) as a source of questions to ask about the situation.

- e) Acting to improve a real-world situation (4) entails finding, in the course of the discussion/debate in, *accommodations* among different worldviews. An accommodation entails finding a version of the situation addressed that different people, with different worldviews, can nevertheless live with.
- f) The inquiry created by principles (a) to (e) is in principle a never-ending process of learning. It is never-ending since taking action to improve the situation will...[yield] a new (less problematical) situation...Learning is never finished!
- g) Explicit organization of the process that embodies principles (a) to (f), enables and embodies *conscious critical reflection* (5) about both the situation itself and also about the thinking about it. This reflection, which leads to learning, can (and should) occur prior to, during and after intervening in the situation to improve it. The process thus itself virtually ensures *reflective practice* by those who make use of it...The SSM user becomes a reflective practitioner.

Figure 4—SSM activity types (adapted from Checkland and Poulter, 2006: 62)



It is important to note that my conceptual framework (see **Figure 1**) is based primarily on SST, not SSM per se. SST can be found in most of the examples of the dissertation, but in **Chapter 6**, I present a situation in which I used SSM more explicitly, but in its “mode 2” application. Whereas Mode 1 can be thought of as “following the SSM recipe”, Mode 2 applies user-

internalized SST and SSM principles in an adaptive and iterative manner (Checkland, 2000: S39). Key differences between Mode 1 and 2 are summarized in **Table 1**:

Table 1—Two SSM modes (reproduced from Checkland, 2000: S39)

Mode 1		Mode 2
Methodology-driven	vs.	situation-driven
Intervention	vs.	interaction
Sometimes sequential	vs.	always iterative
SSM an external recipe	vs.	SSM an internalized model

Checkland (2000: S39) wryly notes that in the complexity of real life experience sometimes ‘uncontrollable discussions break out and anecdotes are exchanged!’. Since every situation involving human beings is unique, any approach able to deal with the changing complexity of real life ‘cannot be reduced to a sequence of steps, which might be handed over to an intelligently programmed robot’ (Checkland and Poulter, 2010: 202). To Checkland (2000: 38) the disappearance of Mode 1 is a good thing, consistent with the “situation-driven” idea that the very point of the methodology is its ‘mouldability by a particular user in a particular situation’. As such, he anticipates it is inevitable that reflective users of SSM will internalize its principles and use them in increasingly sophisticated ways (Checkland 2000: S40). At the same time, some basic guidelines are needed so that when someone says they have used SSM, it is at least true to its principles, even as methods may vary. This led to the development of some basic constitutive rules for SSM (paraphrased from Checkland, 2000: S38):

- Users act according to the assumption that social reality is continuously socially constructed
- The overall process is informed by an understanding of the history of the situation, including cultural, social and political dimensions
- Explicit intellectual devices are consciously used to explore, understand, and act in the situation in question. These must include but are not limited to systems models of purposeful activity based on different declared worldviews
- The process is cyclical and iterative, focused on “learning a way”, through discourse and debate, to generate accommodations that make sense and take action to improve them when possible
- Finally, while not limited to this pool . . . a selection from Rich Picture, Root Definition, CATWOE (Client, Actors, Transformation process, Worldview, Owners, Environmental constraints) . . . , etc. may be used in the process

This last bullet refers to common tools used in SSM processes, particularly for conducting activities 1 and 2 in **Figure 4**.

To summarize, SST introduces the idea of systems and processes meant to be flexible and learning-based to offer more relevant responses to complex social situations. They are not assumed to be “real” objective systems or “wholes” that can be engineered, but rather, are expressions of ways of seeing the world. As such, they are not to be thought of as end products in optimal design processes of a system, for example, but learning devices that surface worldviews that can *help us ask better questions* of complex situations that have no objective, optimal answer. This can help us grapple with external and internal complexity by bringing more perspectives to bear on a situation and help iteratively negotiate accommodations on what to change or not. SSM is a specific methodology intended to do this.

2.2.3.3. Critical systemic thinking—boundaries and power relationships

Critical systems thinking reminds us to make efforts to “sweep in” perspectives from key stakeholders (Churchman, 1979, Flood, 1999, Midgley et al., 1998, Ulrich and Reynolds, 2010), by considering that organizational programs and systems are designed explicitly or implicitly to satisfy particular worldviews and interests, and if the worldviews and interests of primary and other key stakeholders are not present in our theories of change, the systems they spawn—including development projects—are unlikely to generate results which are meaningful to those actors. Critical systemic thinking can be helpful in problematizing the boundaries that organisations draw for their capacity development and related systems.

Critical capacity-building also needs to intentionally examine how power relationships influence the choices of sense-making or learning processes available to social actors to build their understandings and abilities within specific capacity development processes. This includes critically examining the capacity of individuals and organizations to even engage as actors in processes of development and change (Taylor and Clarke, 2008: 12). Bringing power analysis into capacity-building is not such a straightforward endeavor, because although a growing amount of theory *relevant to* capacity-building is available, it is rare to find literature that presents empirical evidence of how power relations affect or are present in capacity-building interventions (Taylor and Clarke 2008: 12). Rowlands (1995: 106) notes that concepts, such as capacity-building, empowerment, participation, sustainability, institutional development, and many others concepts used by development practitioners and planners, have in common ‘a

worrying temptation to use them in a way that takes the troublesome notions of power, and the distribution of power, out of the picture’. This concept is echoed by others as well, who note that capacity-building is frequently portrayed as a value neutral, apolitical process in which participants willingly learn skills and techniques that allow them to better conduct their work (Baser and Morgan, 2008: 71, Tandon, 2010: 97, Clarke and Oswald, 2010: 2). However, as Clegg et al. (2006: 2-3) states, power and organization are inseparable—we cannot think about power without analyzing how it is organized, nor can we make serious inquiry into organizations without looking into power—‘power is to organization as oxygen is to breathing’. In capacity-building, power must be considered because increased capacities of many actors do not necessarily lead to the ability to put those capacities to use. In other words, it is not enough to strengthen capacities at a “power to” level (i.e., latent knowledge, abilities and resources) without at least trying to consider how those capacities might be applied towards some developmental change, and whether enabling conditions are in place that allow this to be possible, i.e., whether key actors have the *power to put their capacities to use* (Ortiz Aragón, 2010a: 7).

Note: In **section 7.2**, I expand the explanation on power to include how power relationships are fundamental for understanding change in complex responsive systems of human relating.

2.2.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed core literature pertaining to my research topic and overall research inquiry. In the following chapter, I explain my research methodology in detail, including introducing a small amount of additional literature on action-research relative to my research methods.

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3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter I describe my overall research process and how it evolved, as well as the reasoning behind the methodological design choices I made. In particular, I present:

- The origins and early evolution of my research interests (3.2)
- An intentional set of methodological principles that I used to lightly guide my research—“Systemic Theories of Change” (STOC) —which has important implications for the types of results generated (3.3)
- An explanation for why I chose action-research of specific cases to explore my research questions (3.4)
- An explanation of how the cases were chosen and the major methodological moments conducted with each organization. (3.5)
- A concluding summary of my overall research approach and process for analyzing my data (3.6)
- An introduction to the empirical analysis chapters (3.7)

Note: In section 3.5 of this chapter I introduce my co-action-research facilitators, Juan Carlos Giles for PDTG, and Fabricio Proaño for Sirua foundation. I briefly mention them now because their names come up before section 3.5.

3.2. Early evolution of the research

I began my methodological journey out of an interest to learn more about how to develop strategies to support the emergence of a marketplace of *local* capacity-building services to provide more relevant services to NGOs in the environmental conservation sector. This included thinking about how to increase awareness of the importance of intangible capacities for conservation to challenge the technical bias that I had seen from experience, and had confirmed in research in which I had been engaged. In my research application to IDS in 2007, I included the following important assumption: *“Although overall consciousness of the need for multiple organizational capacities is increasing, the current felt demand within the sector is around capacities for becoming more effective technically, to the detriment of other capacities needed for overall effectiveness and impact”*. I listed the following capacities in an attempt to broaden the scope of capacities beyond strictly technical ones:

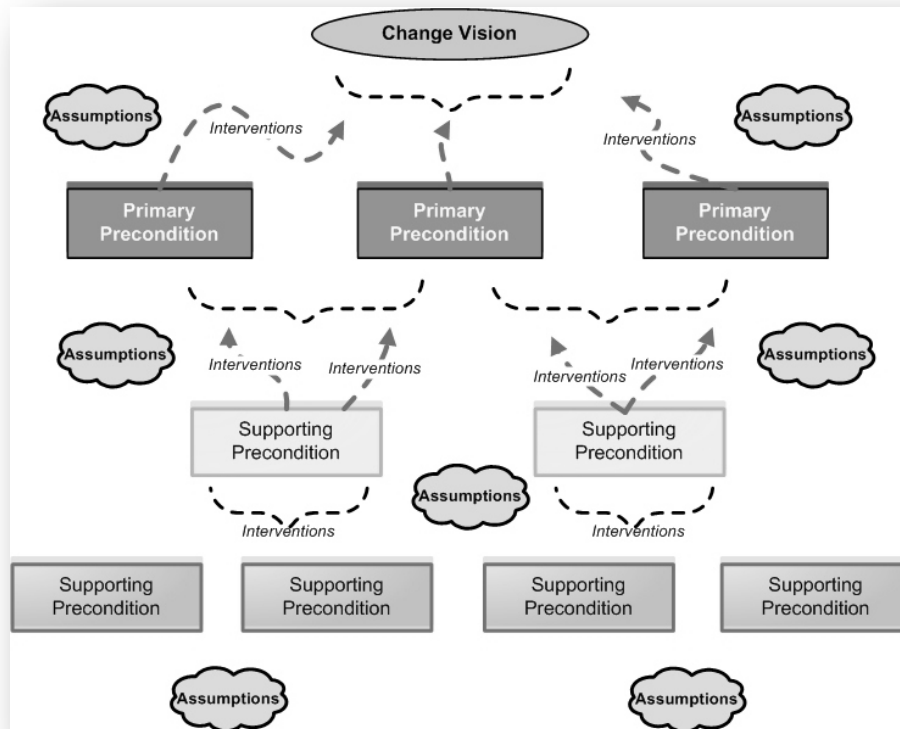
- Capacities to read and learn from complex environments, understand linkages with other development sectors and processes, and develop strategies from a systems perspective
- Capacities to work with other development actors (individuals, communities, organizations, social networks, governments, etc.) from different sectors and interests to set and achieve common goals, and to tackle themes that cannot be addressed effectively unilaterally (governance, advocacy, etc.)
- OD/management capacities (leadership, planning, internal processes, financial management, etc.) that promote more effective and efficient achievement of goals
- Capacities to relate to and work with people within and outside the organization
- Capacities for being effective technically (programmatically), often within project cycles

In retrospect, it is interesting to me that the capacities I listed track very closely to the ECDPM capabilities framework and are framed with the ideas of complexity and systems thinking in mind. The interesting thing is that I had no knowledge of complexity *theory* (I had literally never heard of it before), had only read Senge's classic "The Fifth Discipline" (1990) and sections of the accompanying field book (Senge et al., 1994) from systems literature, and was unaware of the ECDPM study. As a career capacity-building facilitator, I am sure I was exposed to these concepts in different ways, but I had received virtually no internal training on capacity-building or OD in the nine years I had worked with a large American NGO that cast itself as a capacity-building organization—literally, "Building Capacity Worldwide". Baser and Morgan (2008: 9) note that some analysts and almost all practitioners in the cases they researched disdained any interest in theories or abstract concepts about capacity. In my case, I was simply not exposed to it other than when I felt the occasional need to consult "coffee table" business management books.

Although I was unaware of complexity theory, I was well aware of the real-life complexity I faced as a regional coordinator of my organization's Andean office in Quito, Ecuador, as well as the complexities faced by the organizations we "strengthened". The connection between complexity and capacity had also become clearer to me, and indeed, had become an element of significant conversation in my last two years as regional coordinator, before beginning my PhD at IDS. This had come about in large part via three experiences I had (on teams) facilitating large Theory of Change processes. Theory of change is essentially a visual planning process that can be used to design a project, or an organizational strategy, for example. The methodology entails identifying a "vision of success," multiple levels of "preconditions" (i.e., broad outcomes) to that vision of success, interventions that would support those conditions and

assumptions that support the thinking behind the different elements. The different elements are assembled into a visual diagram or “outcome map” to become a theory of change (see, for example: Reisman and Gienapp, 2004, Mackinnon and Amott, 2006, Keystone, 2006, ActKnowledge, 2009). In **Figure 5**, I show the basic visual theory of change concept (Ortiz and Taylor, 2009; adapted from ActKnowledge, 2009).

Figure 5—Generic theory of change diagram



In my theory of change experiences, the concept of analyzing what “conditions” (“preconditions” in theory of change language) need to be in place for change to occur had led participants to a more systemic look at change than I (and my capacity-building colleagues) was accustomed to, incorporating such important ideas as “enabling environment”, “spaces and coordinating mechanisms for change”, and even the need for compatibility between competing worldviews (conservation and development in one case). I saw in those experiences that the capacity implications of asking, “*what capacities are needed to generate and effectively participate in spaces and coordinating mechanisms for change?*”, for example, were potentially huge. At a minimum, I reasoned it would oblige organizations to expand beyond the technical CB focus (i.e. programmatic capacities), or the organizational black box focus (e.g., strengthening the organization’s processes and systems without considering its programmatic

context). My understanding of this potential was clearly present in my original research application to IDS: *“In the Andean region we have found that most of the organizations we have worked with tend to be focused on winning contracts and carrying out multiple projects, with little regard to how their efforts fit into larger processes. Very few of the organizations we have worked with have the capacities to seek out the linkages and maximize the “usefulness” of their projects to larger processes, or to make sure, at least internally, that the sum of their projects contributes to a logical development model or “Theory of Change”. As mentioned earlier, these... capacities include an organization’s ability to read and learn from complex environments, understand linkages with other development sectors and processes, and develop strategies from a systems perspective; as well as capacities to work with other development actors from different sectors and interests to tackle themes that can’t be addressed effectively unilaterally (e.g. governance, advocacy, etc.).”*

Once at IDS, this idea of intangible capacities (i.e., roughly speaking, capacities to deal with complexity, rather than technical capacities) became the focus of my research. In an early presentation seminar of my research intentions (January 2009), I framed the idea as “higher order and systemic capacities”, but generally had a difficult time specifically defining what it was I wanted to research. I spent much time in the seminar publicly indicting NGO self-referential behaviors and not enough time explaining what was motivating me in the first place. After much introspection, I realized that although the idea of intangible capacities was interesting to me as a technical subject, the concept of capacity-building in general had become meaningless to me. This was due, in part, to feeling “burned out” by the pace of my work in NGO project management work for nine years, but also because I was not adequately putting my own transformation in the picture. I was approaching my PhD technically rather than “developmentally”. In my final research outline (an internal IDS document that is literally the approved research plan), I reoriented the focus to include my own search for meaningful capacity-building, casting the idea of personal capacity as *“the ability to morally and ethically engage with the world in order to connect with and support others, and better understand and enjoy my purpose in the process”*, and capacity strengthening as *“an intentional process meant to catalyze the development of my capacities, particularly through the core human activities of inquiry, purposeful action, reflection and learning”*.

From that point on, my overall research focus essentially remained the same, with one notable exception. About half way through (in March 2010 approximately), it became clearer to me that

I was researching methodology rather than intangible capacities per se. My dissertation should be seen as a methodological journey, and this would be my original contribution to research.

3.3. Methodological “capacity strengthening” principles used in framing the research— “Systemic theories of change”

3.3.1. Traditional, “linear” Theory of Change (TOC) methodology

As I considered methodological design issues in my final research outline, I was attracted to the idea of visually mapping theories of change, as in the methodology “Theory of Change” mentioned earlier. Building on my earlier intuitions, I reasoned that having organizations ask “*what conditions need to be in place for important development outcomes to be possible*”—somewhat independently of what the organizations already do—might lead to a complex, non-self-referential understanding of social change. I felt this would then oblige participants to think differently about capacity-building, likely highlighting relational, sense-making and other intangible capacities. I also liked the value of creating visual aids for mapping change and the importance of discussing assumptions of how people think change occurs, and the implications of those assumptions.

However, some real problems with theory of change had become clear to me as I dug deeper into systems thinking literature. I found that although concepts such as “conditions”, if used wisely, could effectively consider complexity, overall, Theory of Change was extremely linear and full of heroic cause and effect language. For example (italics and bold added), Anderson notes that a ‘theory of change approach focuses first on identifying all of the *necessary and sufficient* preconditions for reaching a long-term goal. Only after these conditions have been identified and laid out in a change pathway can the appropriate actions be developed to *bring them about*’ (Anderson, 2004: 13). Keystone and ActKnowledge (2009, 2006) also refer to *necessary and sufficient* conditions. Mackinnon and Amott (2006: 3) refer to activities ‘that will *produce* those conditions’. ActKnowledge (2009) highlights that theory of change ‘shows a *causal pathway* from here to there by specifying what is needed for goals to be achieved’, and goes on to highlight the ability of theory of change to show ‘a clear and testable hypothesis about how change will occur that not only allows you to be accountable for results, but also makes your results more credible because they were *predicted to occur in a certain way*’.

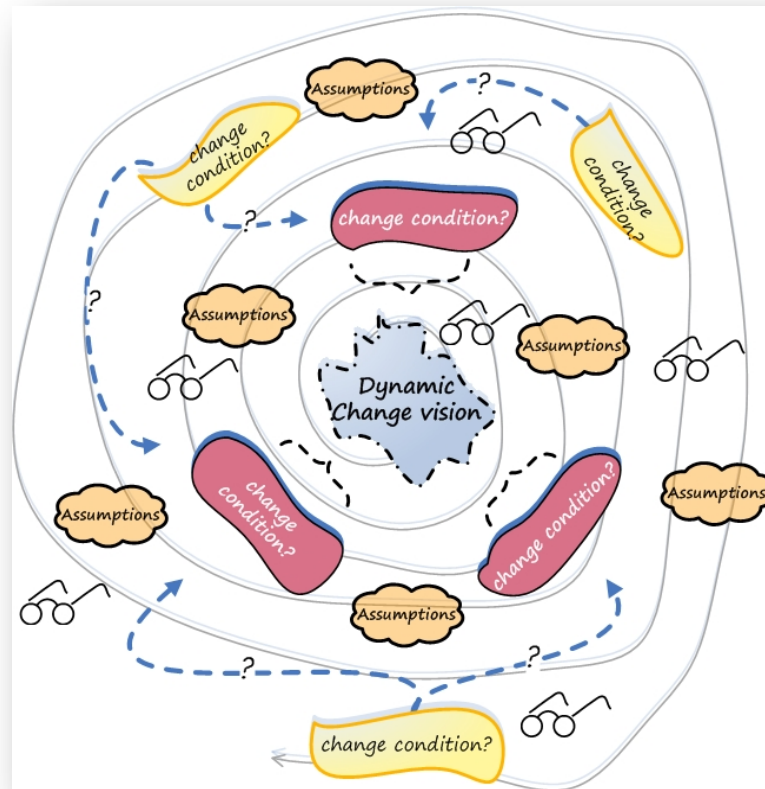
The linear thinking found in much of the theory of change literature followed hard systems thinking assumptions, did not adequately consider complexity, and would be problematic to use

in a systemic methodology. Specifically, change conditions and interventions at lower levels of a theory of change diagram cannot *cause* higher-level conditions to occur, i.e., a linear, cause-effect relationship does not exist. One thing can be said to cause another ‘if the cause is both necessary and sufficient for its effect. One thing is necessary for another if the other cannot occur unless the first one does. One thing is sufficient for another if the occurrence of the first assures the occurrence of the second’ (Ackoff, 1999: 10). Lower-level preconditions might be conceptually necessary conditions that support higher-level conditions, but they are never sufficient for their occurrence because all development conditions are emergent—i.e., they have properties that are more than the sum of their parts and which are the result of multiple factors that complexity renders ‘inherently unknowable to the human mind’ (Flood 1999: 86). Land et al. reinforce this concept from a capacity development point of view by explaining that ‘[e]mergence is an unplanned and uncontrollable process in which properties such as capacity emerge from the complex interactions among all actors in the system and produce characteristics not found in any of the elements of the system’ (Land et al. 2009: 2). As such, an organization’s interventions are ultimately only part of a myriad of factors that might contribute to overall change. The conceptual relationship between change conditions is, like development in general, non-linear.

3.3.2. Soft systems thinking and “systemic” theories of change

I turned to Checkland’s Soft Systems ideas to develop a systemic theory of change approach. The idea that visual representations of thought, including models of “systems”, theory of change diagrams and other visual expressions were not representations of *reality but expressions of ways of seeing the world*, appealed to me. Using this logic, a theory of change diagram could be used not to map linear causal pathways of change, but, like SSM models (see section 6.2), as epistemological learning devices to surface worldviews and *help us ask better questions* of real-life complex situations. This initial thinking was presented as “Systemic Theories of Change” (STOC) in my research outline, which included alternative ways of expressing theory of change diagrams (see Figure 6).

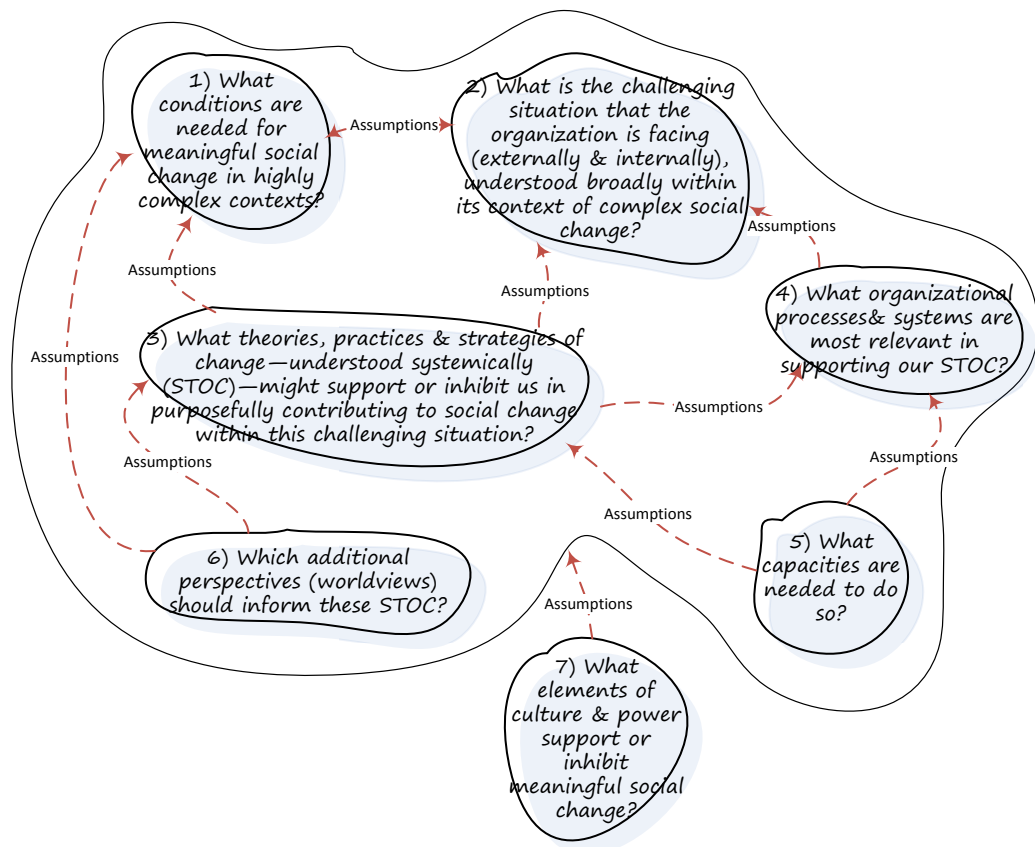
Figure 6—Initial "systemic" theory of change concept diagram



In this diagram, change conditions can be used to represent both “external” conditions important for meaningful social change to be able to occur, as well as “internal” organizational conditions and capacities necessary for supporting that change. The arrows can represent purposeful interventions, spaces, organizations, relationships, or any factor that may support emergent change. The spectacles represent the lenses through which change is visualized and interpreted. No two people will see change exactly the same way. The spiral represents the ongoing, emergent nature of change, which contains individual, organizational and societal assumptions about change. It also connotes that each condition is part of broader, emergent change conditions, including the change vision itself, which is the emergent whole the diagram purported to represent.

In December 2009 (four months into my research), I co-wrote an article in the IDS Bulletin (Ortiz Aragón and Giles Macedo, 2010) updating and detailing these methodological STOC principles (see **Figure 7**):

Figure 7—Systemic theories of change key moments and questions (Taken from Ortiz Aragón and Giles, 2010: 92)



The moments in the diagram are not necessarily chronological; Juan Carlos and I included numbers only for purposes of demonstrating conceptual flow. For each question, various methods can be used, and some methods can be used to answer more than one question. I now explain the diagram:

- 1) Question 1 attempts to analyze the conditions needed for change. It tracks very closely in form with traditional Theory of Change methodology, with the exception that we (Juan Carlos and I or Fabricio and I) would ask this question (methodologically, not literally) from a soft systemic perspective—i.e., we would take answers (e.g., maps of change conditions) as ideas based on worldviews to help us improve debate and reflection on change, rather than as final products representing our understanding of reality. In the article, I explain how the theory of change concept of “necessary and sufficient” preconditions is overly linear and not part of STOC assumptions.
- 2) Question 2 intends to explore the specific challenge area that an organization wishes to explore. It borrows directly from Checkland’s concept of a problematic situation, and the idea of expressing this situation using rich pictures. Methodologically questions 1 and 2 are highly related, but placed in this order to reinforce the value of asking about

what is needed before thinking about responses. (I changed “problematic” to “challenging” throughout my research)

- 3) Question 3 is meant simply to answer the question “*So what should we do programmatically?*,” considering our better understanding of what is needed (i.e., change conditions, no. 1) and our current challenges (item 2).
- 4) Question 4 is meant to look at how any intended programmatic changes (from Q3) would affect organizational processes and systems. I assumed this moment in particular might be opportune for using actual SSM to model different systems of human activity based on different worldviews.
- 5) Question 5 could have been included in Q4 under the concept of “internal conditions”, but I chose to separate it to isolate the capacity question intentionally. Both Q4 and Q5 implicitly challenge the black box approach to capacity-building that assumes that an organization can be generically strengthened, decontextualized from the work it does. This also reinforces a core research assumption that capacities for social change in complex environments would be shown to be different if we asked the capacity question *after* having grappled with complex change issues (i.e., external conditions).
- 6) Question 6 is meant to incorporate additional worldviews that could enrich understanding of complex situations (based on Checkland’s SSM), as well as ensure that primary stakeholders’ perspectives in particular were considered (based on critical systems thinking).
- 7) Question 7 suggests that elements of culture and power should be analyzed throughout.

The use of these principles was intended to contribute to a more synergetic relationship between internal organisational conditions and conditions for social change (i.e., external conditions).

The initial or existing relationship between these conditions can be expressed in the contextualised “challenging situation” (item 2), and at the end of the methodological process, the “new, strengthened” challenging situation can be reanalysed, as part of an on-going learning process—similar to the cycle Checkland proposes with SSM (see **section 2.2.3.**). The “lingua franca” or “common currency” of the methodology are conscious or unconscious assumptions that include beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings that are the ultimate source of values and action (Schein 2004: 26). Lastly, the entire process was intended to be conducted using action-research as an overall methodological framework.

In summary, although Juan Carlos, Fabricio, and I (as primary facilitators) would establish intervention objectives based on capacity issues that each organization would define with us in

each specific action-research process, it is accurate to say that I intended to conduct these methodological moments at some point in each process, complemented by other methods that would emerge along the way. In other words, I assumed that these moments would be generally applicable, regardless of the specific action-research focus of each process. This focus changed along the way but was very present as both processes began.

3.4. Justification for the use of case studies and action-research

3.4.1. Why cases?

As noted in **section 2.2.1**, capacity-building consists of intentional methodological attempts to enhance, improve, unleash, or develop capacities. To be able to explore how capacity-building might be different in complex environments, including how systemic methodological approaches might support that approach, would require methodological intervention in real-life organizations. This intervention would need to be adaptive to respond to the emergent nature of organizational complexity, and deep, to be able to study capacity-building as an iterative process of learning (Reeler, 2007, Ortiz and Taylor, 2009, Kaplan, 1999, Britton, 2005). Action research on a small number of cases would allow such an approach.

It is important to clarify that I did case studies using action-research as the methodological frame and not using case study methodology (Yin, 2009). Stake clarifies that case study is not primarily a methodological choice, but a choice of what is to be studied: ‘By whatever methods we choose to study *the case*’ (Stake, 2005: 443). The case can then be studied by many methods, quantitatively or qualitatively. For qualitative-focused studies such as mine, case study concentrates on experiential knowledge and on how social, political and other contextual factors affect it (Stake 2005: 444). This is consistent with the systems thinking core notion of analyzing phenomena in relation to their context (i.e., systemic analysis) (Ison, 2008, Checkland, 1981, 1993, Capra, 1996), and via action-oriented experiential processes that reveal deeper worldviews and intentions as people make sense of their complex realities (Flood, 2001, Checkland, 2000).

Stake differentiates between intrinsic and instrumental cases. An intrinsic case refers to a study undertaken primarily to obtain a better understanding of the case itself (Stake, 2005: 445). Study is undertaken, for example, because of an intrinsic interest in a particular person (e.g., Nelson Mandela), event (e.g., Cuban Missile crisis), or organization. I would have been conducting an intrinsic case study had I studied PDTG as a unique form of organization that

works in social movements, or Sirua, to better understand the meanings behind private conservation. The focus of my research was different, however, in that I studied PDTG and Sirua to learn more about organizational capacity-building in complex environments. These cases played a supportive role in helping facilitate understanding of something else—they served to provide insight into an issue that was not the case itself, even though it was intended to be of benefit to the case organizations. The distinctions between intrinsic and instrumental cases are not hard and fast, but it is safe to classify my cases as primarily instrumental.

Beyond the decision to study “the case”, other important distinctions about case study are not found in all action-research. These differences primarily concern the depth of study, the process of study, and the presentation style of findings.

Depth of study

Stake (2005: 447) notes that a general attitude of the case researcher is to seek out those cases that have the most potential for deep learning, and to display a curiosity for the uncommon and particular, over the ordinary. This stance may include decisions on working with cases that grant the most access or with whom the researchers can spend the most time (Stake 2005: 451). Indeed, in my own case selection process, we (Juan Carlos and I) vetted organizations for their willingness to participate in reflective processes that would be more time consuming than “quick and dirty” organizational strengthening processes to which these organizations may have been accustomed. We also favored organizations with which my co-researchers or I already had a work history to avoid a steep learning curve. Both these considerations led to our ability to conduct deep case studies. Cases also go deep by focusing on multiple contexts, including historical, cultural, and physical contexts. Later in this chapter (**section 3.5.**), and again in my empirical analysis chapters, the reader will see how the historical starting conditions, cultural values, and geographic and physical spaces all provide critical knowledge for understanding how complexity emerged in both helpful and unhelpful ways with both PDTG and Sirua. Exploring context quickly reveals that all knowledge is context dependent (Flyvbjerg, 2007: 391), with contexts going a long way toward making relationships understandable (Stake, 2005: 449).

Process of study and presentation of results

Again complementary with systemic thinking, qualitative case studies in particular eschew simplistic causal explanations of events, but instead look for explanations that are sequenced, interacting, surprising (even coincidental or contradictory), cyclical, and contextual (Stake

2005: 449). This favors reflective over observational thinking, and the narrative presentation of results, complemented by illustrations and other aesthetic forms (Stake 2005: 454). Flyvbjerg notes that case studies often contain a substantial amount of narrative because narratives are helpful in presenting the complexities and contradictions of real life (Flyvbjerg, 2007: 399-400). Stake adds that considering that the essence of qualitative understanding is experience and experiential knowledge, narratives—of group interpretation, of how relationships emerge, and other case activity—can enhance the reader’s experience with the case by providing opportunities for ‘vicarious experience’ (Stake, 2005: 454). In my empirical/analysis chapters, I have chosen to follow a narrative style to unpack the cases because the participants’ own words help “tell the story” and convey complex meanings that would be filtered out through analytical reductions of those stories. As Stake notes: ‘We come to know what has happened partly in terms of what others reveal as their experience...[This occurs in] social processes, in which people bend, spin, consolidate and enrich their understandings’ (Stake 2005: 454). My decision to delve deep into cases allowed me to not only enter into the streams of organizational complexity, but to preserve and represent some of that complexity via its communicative narrative flow.

3.4.2. Why action-research?

In my explanation on cases, I mentioned my practical need to use a research approach that would allow for the study of capacity-building *interventions* in complex environments. This would require an action-based approach to learning, but also an emergent learning-based approach to action. This need arose because the complexity of the cases obliged a process that would allow my co-researchers and I to immerse ourselves in real-life human situations and adaptively follow whatever path might emerge (Checkland and Holwell, 1998a: 11). Reason (2006: 189) articulates action-research as ‘an emergent process of engagement with worthwhile practice purposes, through many ways of knowing, in participative and democratic relationships’. He presents this process as four critical themes in which choice has to be exercised to generate quality action-research. I now briefly unpack Reason’s four themes to further explain why I chose action-research:

Addressing worthwhile practical purposes with ‘the primacy of the practical’

Reason emphasizes that all people are participating actors in their world—i.e., the nature of humans, the way we live and survive is through action. As such, inquiry should have a direct, moral purpose of contributing to people’s action in the world—as ‘inquiry in the pursuit of worthwhile purposes for the flourishing of persons, communities and the ecology of which we

are all a part' (Reason, 2006: 188). This inquiry includes the idea that locally generated knowledge should be used to support local sense-making processes and not only be generated to support theoretical debates elsewhere. This 'primacy of the practical' (Heron, 1996), however, does not imply a narrow focus on practice; but rather, a congruence of theory and practice that allows us to be more reflective and informed as we act in the world, even as we test our claims of knowledge with evidence generated from practice (Reason, 2006: 189). In this sense, theory is practical and practice enacts theory, as well as life philosophy (Gramsci, 2008). However, whether theory has been generated or not, worthwhile purpose has an emancipatory focus that addresses questions of power and seeks increased experiential sense-making abilities amongst participants (Reason, 2006: 193).

My research was based on helping both organizations with their real-life challenges, rather than being theory driven. At the same time, both processes were heavily reflective (as will be shown) and involved significant meta learning (i.e., reflecting and learning about the meanings behind that which emerged from the process, and the process itself). That said, the use of external theory was almost exclusively done by me as part of my PhD process, and not done by participants. Participants were not generating dialogue with existing theory, other than that which they already discussed in their line of work, or the theory I introduced through explanations.

Participatory and democratic processes

At a methodological level, action-research should be participatory for the practical reason that those who experience challenges in their practice are the most knowledgeable of those challenges (Reason, 2006: 189). However, ethical and political considerations also speak to people's right and ability to contribute to processes and decisions that affect their lives (Altrichter et al., 2002, Fals Borda, 2001, Greenwood and Levin, 2007, McTaggart, 1991). As such, 'action-research is a participative and democratic process that seeks to do research with, for, and by people; to redress the balance of power in knowledge creation; and to do this in an educative manner that increases participants' capacity to engage in inquiring lives' (Reason, 2006: 189).

'Worthwhile practical purpose' and 'participatory and democratic processes' both have implications on the role of the facilitator and the balance between action and research—i.e., in the relative emphasis placed on the practical transformation vis-à-vis the advancement of more general knowledge or theory (Huxham and Vangen, 2003: 384). Consequently, this affects

whether organizational participants are aware that they are participating in research beyond the practical action or learning they seek (p. 386). At one extreme, perhaps, is action taken in an organization by a researcher in which the organization only seeks practical improvements, while the researcher also desires to generate more general, theoretical knowledge. This is still action-research to the researcher, but to the organization, it is simply practical “action”. At the other end of the spectrum are action-research definitions that seek practical action and knowledge generation but with a highly participative and democratic social change worldview (for example, see: Fals Borda, 2001, Greenwood and Levin, 2007, McIntyre, 2008, McTaggart, 1991). Indeed, some strands of action-research have a rich history of connecting issues of political action, social change, multiple ways of seeing and knowing the world, and engagement with wider social norms and theories of change (Burns, 2007: 15).

In my PhD action-research, generally speaking, although the methods used allowed for a good amount of *content control* by the participants, *method control* and the “research” focus was mostly retained by my co-researchers and myself. A more participatory and democratic process would require a shift from the researcher-controlled extreme expressed by Huxham and Vangen (2003), towards action-research with a more overt participatory social change agenda, including more shared control of the methodology. That said, at an overall design level, the PDTG process was responsive to that organization’s internal strengthening process in that “they called us”, as it were, to support their own process. With Sirua, the entire process was designed in constant communication with organizational leaders to respond to their needs, but with more control given to me (Alfredo) to guide the process. In both cases, we (primarily Juan Carlos and I with PDTG, and Fabricio and I with Sirua) insisted on wide participation; a point that will be illustrated in the main dissertation chapters.

An emergent, conversational developmental form

If action-research is intimately bound up in people’s lives and work (Reason, 2006: 189), and change emerges in the interplay of the desires, intentions and actions of all the lives and work of people in a given social setting (Stacey, 2007: 303), then action-research design must be flexible and allow for the possibility that questions and purposes may change as new knowledge as situations emerge (Reason, 2006: 197). This implies methodology designed emergently along the way, rather than predesigned linear programs with ‘hard and fast methods’. Again, emergent methodological approaches are entirely consistent with the main strands of systems theory upon which I am drawing (Ison, 2008, Flood, 2001, Checkland and Holwell, 1998a). .

In my research the focus on narrative, conversational process was central, as noted in my commentary on case studies in **section 3.4.1**. Both processes were highly emergent; in PDTG's case because of the "on-call" nature of the work, and in Sirua's case, because Fabricio and I insisted on identifying new opportunities as they emerged. Neither process ended up "as planned", which is a positive indicator for emergent process (Ortiz and Taylor, 2009).

Encompassing many ways of knowing

AR assumes that knowledge should be relevant to local realities (i.e., in content), in languages that people find meaningful (i.e., in form), and via processes of construction that in and of themselves help people make sense out of their real life challenges, intentions, and desires. This implies extending epistemologies beyond narrow ways of seeing and acting in the world (Reason, 2006: 189). Heron (1999: 122) offers a pyramid of "ways of knowing" as four broad categories, each building on the levels beneath. At the base of the pyramid is *experiential* knowing that represents the way we come to know through daily lived experience, including the energy, people, places processes, and things we take in through our senses and intuition (Heron 1999, p. 122). Then, through *presentational* knowledge, (e.g., via graphic, drama, music, poetry, storytelling, and other non-discursive means), we reveal our tacit or intuitive grasp of the significance of experience (1996: 41, 1999: 122). Presentational/aesthetic forms of expression can effectively represent complex patterns of relations and tacit knowledges, while discursive forms favor explicit knowledge (Seeley and Reason, 2008: 4), often in the form of propositions. *Propositional* knowing is expressed in statements that "something is the case" (Heron, 1999: 122), often in terms of descriptive and theoretical statements—i.e., the traditional version of research findings (Heron, 1996: 41). In addition, at the top of the pyramid, *practical* knowing shows we know how "to do" something, which demonstrates our skills and competencies. As a whole, the four levels are all experiential and people tacitly interweave them in many ways in everyday life (Heron and Reason, 2008: 367). "Knowing" in action-research is said to be more valid when grounded in experience, expressed through our stories, images and full range of senses, enriched through theories that make sense to us, and expressed in worthwhile action in our lives (Heron and Reason 2008: 367).

Utilizing many ways of knowing was a central part of my methodology, as will be explained in more detail at the start of Chapter 4. Experiential knowing, via reenactment and reflection on life experiences, presentational knowing, via drawings, debates and other presentational forms, and propositional knowing, via meta/abstracting reflections and writings on the meanings that were emerging, were core to both processes. Practical knowing was less a focus with PDTG, but

was prominent in the Sirua process, primarily due to the task-oriented nature of developing a strategic plan (see **section 3.5.2.**).

The process of action-research

AR involves iterative cycles of action and reflection. Key processes include planning a change, acting and observing the process and consequences of change, reflecting on these processes and consequences, and then continuing within the same spiral of self-reflective cycles by re-planning, acting, reflecting, etc. (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005: 563). This action-research cycle assumes that worthwhile practical purposes are being addressed, while at the same time, being concerned about how we link the practical things we do with a wider field of scholarship (Reason, 2006: 189). The corollary is that action-research offers opportunities for theory development that other methods do not, including generating rich data about what people say and do—and what theories are relevant—when they are faced with a real need to take action (Huxham and Vangen, 2003: 384).

I comment in detail about the implementation of the process of AR in **section 8.3.3.**

3.5. Case backgrounds and explanation of methodological process with each organization

In this subsection, I present the Sirua Foundation and PDTG in more detail. I then describe the logic of both processes as they actually unfolded methodologically.

3.5.1. *Program for Democracy and Global Transformation (hereafter, PDTG or “the Program”)*

3.5.1.1. Organizational background and interest in the action-research

Organizational Background⁴

PDTG is a self-described militant, activist organization working for social justice, with a strong political agenda focused on changing uncritical, hegemonic ways of seeing the world and development intervention in the world. PDTG began in 2003 as a research program within the sociology department of the University of San Marcos in Lima, Perú, but is now an independent social organization focused on trans-disciplinary analysis of relations of dominance in the world, and ways of democratizing those relations.

Strong within its members’ identities is the need to challenge what they perceive to be the inequitable status quo and to propose alternatives to what they conceive to be neoliberal, Western capitalist, paternalistic, sexist, structurally unjust power systems and cultures. They approach their work through the concept of “weaving knowledges,” which means finding ways to connect critical sociological and anthropological theory from academia with local knowledges, practices and worldviews of actors engaged in social movements in ongoing challenges in Perú and Latin America. They do this through editing and publishing academic pieces that critically analyze current development conflicts, as well as by accompanying and strengthening the capacities of key organizations working within social movements—for example, women’s and indigenous groups.

A core assumption underlying PDTG’s work is that social movements offer an important alternative to hegemonic development thinking and practice, and by accompanying and strengthening key organizations in social movements, much can be understood about the active

⁴ This entire description of PDTG was written for the article “Shifting Identity from Within the Conversational Flow of Organisational Complexity” (Ortiz Aragón, 2012), and was edited by PDTG’s director at the time. It includes some text paraphrased and translated from <http://www.democraciaglobal.org/presentacion>, accessed December 2011.

struggles of oppressed people in their dynamic local realities. This assumption can provide evidence of development alternatives, whereas critical theory can enable transformational praxis within social movements. The accompaniment and strengthening work is mainly done via the programmatic area “Ñoqanchiq,” meaning “we, together,” whereas the critical research and publishing work is done by the programmatic area Tejiendo Saberes (TS) (literally, weaving knowledges). In PDTG’s own words: *“In this way, as a laboratory of critical knowledge and of development of capacities for personal and social transformation, we wish to contribute to democratization processes and to the production and networking of emancipatory knowledge, within and between social movements”*.

Main participants in the research

PDTG was roughly divided into three programmatic areas as shown in the third level in **Figure 8⁵**. In addition to those in the diagram, board president Paula also participated extensively. Juan-Carlos Giles was the co-action-researcher and me, Alfredo Ortiz, the lead action-researcher. John Torres provided facilitation support. Many other people were working with PDTG during the research period, but mainly as consultants working on specific projects.

PDTG motivations for participation and documentation of early challenges

I came to work with PDTG by way of my co-researcher Juan-Carlos Giles, who had been working with PDTG for two years as a process facilitator and specialist in the methodology Reflect Action (R/A) (see **section 4.2 for more detail**). Early on in the conversations with PDTG, Juan-Carlos relayed to me in an email the following motivations behind its interest in participating in the research (late April 2009). PDTG leadership wished to:

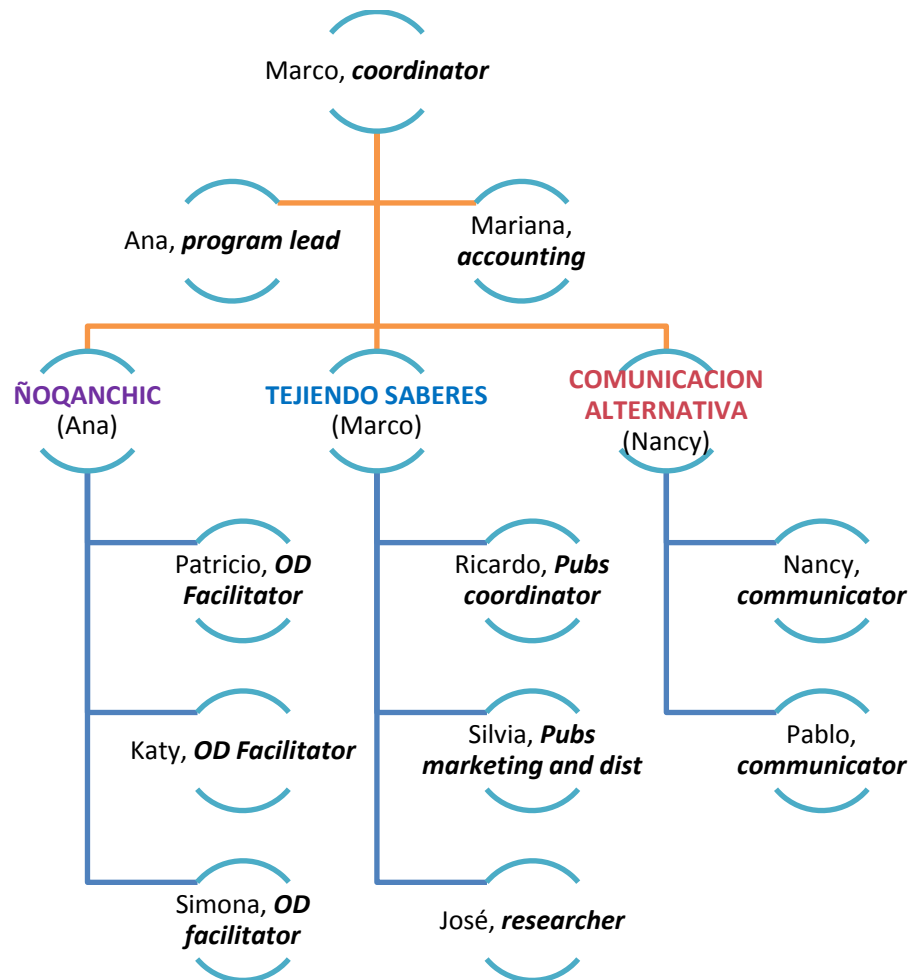
- Develop a work culture that promotes responsible completion of tasks
- Generate higher levels of identification and commitment between individuals and the organization
- Better develop programmatic coordination within specific work areas
- Clarify strategic orientation and value proposition to primary stakeholders

Between May and June 2009, Juan-Carlos and I conducted interviews with Marco, four staff members, and a member of PDTG’s board of directors. PDTG leaders suggested this group as being knowledgeable of organizational history, key strengths, and challenges. The purpose of the interviews was to begin mapping the “problematic situation” PDTG wished to address,

⁵ PDTG leaders have requested that I make the names of the AR participants anonymous. As such I have randomly created names for research participants, and used them consistently throughout the dissertation.

obtain individual perspectives on the issues, and better inform ourselves as facilitators/action-researchers (Juan-Carlos Giles and me) of the challenges so that we might conceive of relevant initial methodological processes.

Figure 8—Approximate PDTG organizational structure



The interviews revealed that in the months leading up to the start of the action-research, PDTG was experiencing internal conflicts that had resulted in three people leaving the organization. Much of the turmoil was related to political differences between members, some of which favored supporting state-led development processes and others who favored bottom-up social movements as alternatives to mainstream development. Some felt that many of the debates about change disguised power struggles for organizational orientation and control, further complicated by the fact that the organizational leaders, Marco and Ana, are partners, and some perceived them to be a self-protecting block within the organization. Tension was also due to

disagreements on whether PDTG should remain a militant collective or become a mainstream NGO. Complaints also abounded about PDTG being no more than an uncoordinated collection of individual causes, with poor quality of work, lack of dedication, inadequate organizational coordination and structure, and problematic power relationships more generally.

Indeed, on the morning of the first workshop in July 2009, these conflicts came to the fore as we were delayed by an hour as Juan-Carlos counseled a current PTDG member on whether she should participate in the action-research process, and even whether or not she would want to remain in the organization. Shortly thereafter, she and another member (I will use the fictitious names Roberta and Edwin) both decided to transition out of the organization, which resulted in five members who had left since the beginning of the year. The reasons for these conflicts are complex and will be explored to some degree in this case study, but they present an important backdrop to the start of the action-research process.

3.5.1.2. Research focus and overall process

Research focus

Although the “pre-process” interviews had generated knowledge on some general “areas of concern,” Juan-Carlos and I, in agreement with Marco and Ana, decided to dedicate the entire first workshop in July 2009 to designing specific objectives for the process and not assume that any previous meetings or interviews had resolved that issue. In that workshop, participants defined the following action-research purpose:

Develop a shared organizational identity via the identification, recognition and valuing of individual and collective capacities and challenges.

Participants also identified a core perspective or “worldview” from which to approach the design of the process: *“The process should recognize diversity (and differences) and value and build on complementarities in order to support coherence between external social change pursuits and internal personal and organizational change.* Lastly, workshop participants identified as a starting constraint PDTG’s “overly activist” culture that did not tend to dedicate significant time for reflection or OD.

Participant and researcher roles and positionality

Before the workshops began, Juan-Carlos and I communicated to PDTG leadership and staff members our desire to approach any process with PDTG as action-research. This would include the core idea ‘that the researcher does not remain an observer outside the subject of investigation but becomes a participant...in the action, and the process of change itself becomes the subject of research’ (Checkland, 1981, 1993: 152). Our main role would be as methodological specialists but we also cast ourselves as entering into a collective commitment with PDTG to investigate and engage in reflection on issues relevant to them as an organization (McIntyre, 2008: 1), as well as to my PhD research. We did intend to involve organizational collaborators in participative and democratic relationships (Reason, 2006: 189), including in planning, implementing and taking individual and/or collective action that leads to a useful solution that benefits the people involved (McIntyre, 2008: 1). In no way did we consider ourselves to be neutral facilitators, or simple providers of methods. Indeed, Juan-Carlos was considered an “insider” collaborator of PDTG when we began. Our main roles were as follows:

- Play a facilitative role to give the process coherence, and a methodological role as important to my PhD process. PDTG, however, guided the overall process and called on Juan-Carlos and me as needed, as part of their own broader organizational strengthening process (see key moments below).
- Act as “intentional instigators” or problematizers. Organizational leaders from our recent work with another organization had asked Juan-Carlos and I (and other external facilitators) to stir up the pot and not be afraid to both challenge assumptions and offer “expert” knowledge in our field. They expected people in our role to instigate, and gave us license to do so. We asked for this same license from PDTG and feel it was granted rather openly.
- Participate in most methodological moments, including exercises that reveal individual identity and positionality. We intentionally wished to get to know PDTG members better and vice versa over the course of the process.
- Participate in PDTG events and processes formally outside of the remit of the action-research to show solidarity with their overall cause, with which both of us openly sympathized. We also did so to keep up with activities relevant to their capacity development, and in some cases, used knowledge generated from those processes in our workshops and meetings.

PDTG member roles were varied and included active support in the design of the workshops (particularly the last two) and follow up tasks after the workshops, including providing feedback on workshop reports and other documents produced in the process. Towards the end of the process, Ana (Program Lead) brought up that the power of the facilitators had not been critically examined, and during the final evaluation of the process, several people mentioned that they (PDTG members) should have taken a more active role in the methodological design. In **Chapters 7 and 8**, I return to this issue and discuss power relationships between the primary facilitation teams and the other participants.

Key moments and the overall process

The action-research process that Juan-Carlos and I facilitated was a part of a broader organizational strengthening process that PDTG was engaged in approximately from January 2009 through December 2010. Our workshops were “actions” within their strengthening process, beyond additional actions that flowed from our workshops and other activities. Although PDTG had already begun a series of meetings and one workshop before Juan-Carlos and I formally entered into the process, our first two workshops gave the process a kick start of sorts by reengaging PDTG members in reflective introspection that they noted had been lacking for several months (which was communicated to us in the final evaluation). Our initial participation in PDTG’s strengthening process was as follows:

- Initial outreach activities primarily conducted by my co-facilitator Juan-Carlos Giles, from January through May 2009.
- Background interviews and meetings conducted by both Juan-Carlos and I in May–June, 2009
- Workshop 1 (July 2009), designed to develop specific action-research process objectives
- Workshop 2 (July 2009), the start of in-depth exploration of themes that would emerge in WS 1⁶

Our main engagement with PDTG from August 2009 through April 2010 was via email and Skype exchanges, participation in various meetings, and four workshops (convened by PDTG) attended by Juan-Carlos. These workshops covered such themes as integration of new members to the organization (identified as an important action in WS 2), taking stock of PDTGs organizational strengthening processes, evaluation/planning, and internal communication. An important result of these workshops and meetings was the decision to form an organizational

⁶ Results from the first two workshops are shared in some detail in Chapter 4.

strengthening committee to take control of internal strengthening processes, which included the development of a strengthening agenda for 2010 that included workshops to deal with the various issues that had emerged along the way, and which still needed addressing.

In a formal communication sent to Juan-Carlos and me in March 2010, PDTG's strengthening committee shared several conclusions related to PDTGs strengthening process, and formally requested our support in developing an organizational theory of change and in clarifying the hybrid nature of PDTG as an organization. The letter stated that the request for theory of change was inspired by a feeling that internal issues had been the main focus of recent organizational reflection, to the detriment of strategic and political thinking (indeed, all workshops since July 2009 had focused on internal issues). They hoped to generate dialogue between personal, organizational, and societal dimensions of their theory of change to balance this situation. The desire to generate better understanding of its hybrid nature was intended to clarify the boundaries between PDTG's identity as political militant collective versus its identity as a non-profit organization that receives project funding (from European donors) to strengthen other key organizations engaged in social movements (such as The National Confederation of Peruvian Communities Affected by Mining—CONACAMI). The document directly situated the present action-research process within PDTG's overall strengthening process. The following activities emerged directly from this moment:

- “Playa Arica” workshop (March 2010) designed to conduct an evaluation of PDTG's 2009 activities and develop an operational plan for the remainder of 2010. Juan-Carlos facilitated this workshop separate from his formal role in the action-research, but the lines were beginning to blur between “our” action-research and PDTG's overall strengthening process.
- Workshop 3 (April 2010), facilitated by Juan-Carlos and myself. Also known as “*The Cluny workshops*,” WS 3 occurred over four days in a week and a half period. They were designed to develop an organizational theory of change that would help clarify the boundaries between PDTG's identity as a political collective versus a more structured social change organization that conducted projects (as mentioned above).⁷
- In May–June 2010, Juan-Carlos and I provided methodological support to PDTG for the “Diálogo de Saberes y Movimientos” (Dialogue between knowledges and social movements), a large event designed to generate synergies between key actors and organizations that participate in social movements in Perú and Latin America. Our

⁷ Results from the Cluny workshops are shared in detail in Chapter 6.

participation was outside of the formal boundaries of the action-research, but I made a separate trip to Lima to participate in this event.

From July–November 2010, I helped PDTG frame an article on organizational epistemology they were planning on writing, and Juan-Carlos and I provided organized inputs to aid in the completion of their strategic plan. Our last formal moment with PDTG was what I refer to as workshop 4 (December 2010), designed to help PDTG start its annual planning process for 2011 and bring closure to the formal action-research activities⁸. By May 2011, I had shared the final workshop report with PDTG. I have continued to collaborate with PDTG since the end of the process (still as a volunteer), although less intensively than before.

In this dissertation, I focus primarily on the four workshops I co-facilitated and only draw anecdotally from other moments. I have made this choice primarily because my research is focused on better understanding how methodology can be used to help organizations grapple with complexity, and these four workshops were the most intense moments of methodological experimentation. That said the process did have an ongoing, yet emerging identity that added up to more than a series of workshops. Indeed, in the final evaluation, various participants noted that they felt that at the end of the day, the action-research gave meaning and structure to PDTG's overall organizational strengthening process. Throughout the dissertation, I do share how different key moments contribute to building up a bigger picture over time, beyond how specific methods may or may not be effective.

3.5.1.3. Main capacity outputs

Most of our research products were workshop reports, as Juan Carlos and I were generally “on call” to plug into PDTG's ongoing strengthening processes. The Cluny workshops in April 2010 produced high quality analysis (as reflected by participants) on organizational theories of change and as such, the related reports were expected to be major inputs into finalizing PDTG's strategic plan (which was being done outside of our intervention). An additional output from the Cluny workshops was the article “Shifting Identity from Within the Conversational Flow of Organisational Complexity” (Ortiz Aragón, 2012), which was reviewed and lightly edited by PDTG director Marco. After the Cluny workshops, Juan-Carlos and I were asked to take a more active role in helping PDTG complete their strategic plan. We produced an analysis of the draft plan and recommendations on how to incorporate key assumptions and advances from their theory of change work, as well as specific steps for finalizing the plan. The last two workshop

⁸ Some results from this workshop are shared in chapter 7.

reports to PDTG included detailed analysis on how I was interpreting learning from the action-research process itself.

I present capacity-building outcomes in Chapters 4–8. For now, I end by noting that political, methodological and relational capacities emerged as the most important for dealing with PDTG's complex environment. This included the need to improve organizational abilities for processing learning, and for developing and utilizing knowledge based on the specific needs, cultures, and languages of distinct actors in social movements. Internally, capacities for processing and learning from experience, integrating individuals (the whole person) within the organization, and developing individual capacities were highlighted.

3.5.2. *Sirua Foundation*

3.5.2.1. Organizational background and interest in the action-research

Main participants in the research

Sirua	Fauna and Flora International
Fernando Echeverría, Director (Quito)	Julio Bernal, Ecuador Programme Manager (Quito)
Lenin Boada, Field coordinator (San Lorenzo)	Robert (Rob) Bensted-Smith, Regional Director, Americas & the Caribbean (Quito)
Manuel Nicaragua (Nicaragua), Field Programme Assistant (San Lorenzo)	Kerstin Swahn, Programme Manager, Americas & Caribbean (Quito)
Manuel Valencia (Valencia), Ranger supervisor (San Lorenzo)	External Facilitators
Teófilo Rivero, Ranger (San Lorenzo)	Alfredo Ortiz, lead action-researcher
Eladio Caicedo, Ranger (San Lorenzo)	Fabricio Proaño, co-action-researcher
Silvia Harcourt, board member (Quito)	

Organizational Background

Fundación Sirua (hereinafter “Sirua”) is a private conservation organization that owns and manages the 10,200 hectare Awacachi Biological Corridor (CBA in Spanish) private reserve located in the Esmeraldas Province of northwestern Ecuador (very close to the Colombian border and the Pacific coast). The Awacachi Biological Corridor is part of the northwest Ecuador Chocó bioregion, which is a global conservation priority with moist tropical Chocó forest supporting extraordinarily high species diversity and levels of endemism. The Corridor contains a significant proportion of the highly threatened Ecuadorian Chocó rainforest, and fauna and flora that are threatened at both national and global levels. It also serves a vital role as a biological Corridor maintaining connectivity between the region’s two largest remnants of Chocoan forest. Lastly, the Corridor also provides essential ecosystem services (e.g., micro-climate regulation, water catchment area, and CO₂ storage) and has cultural significance to at least one local ethnic group.⁹

⁹ This paragraph was provided in its entirety by Julio Bernal of FFI.

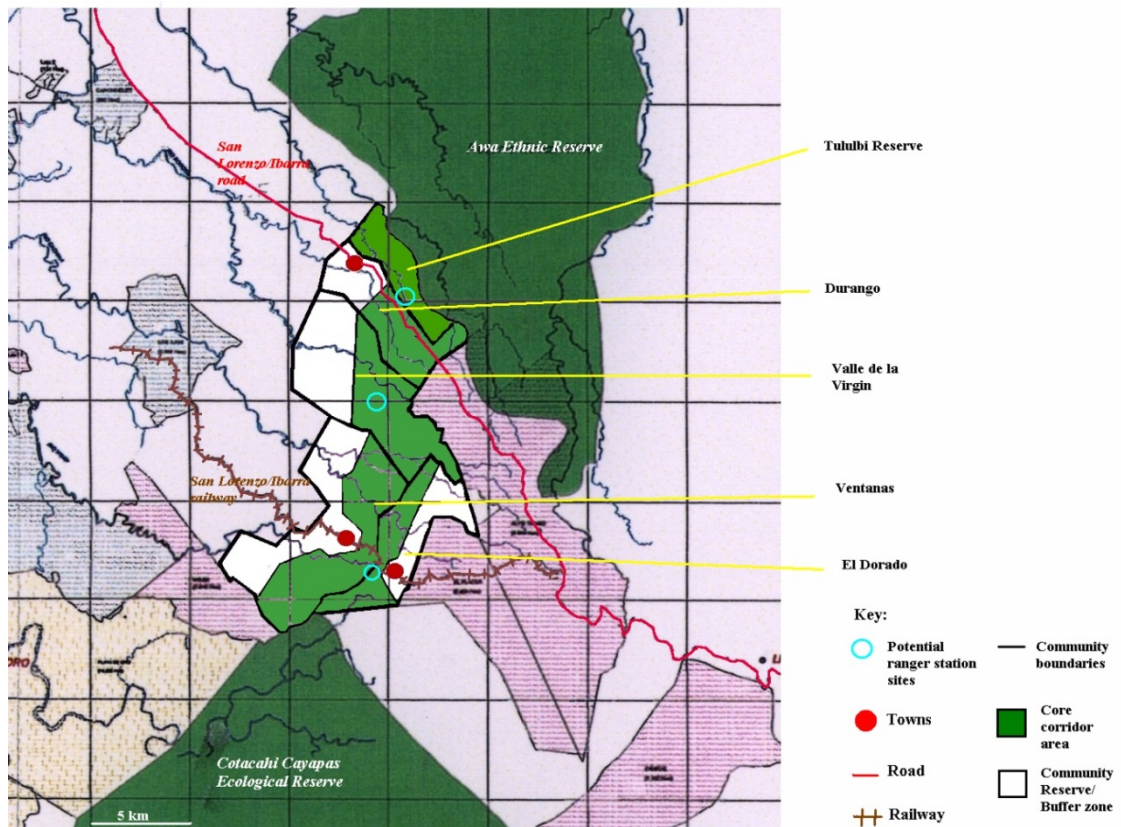
What is now Sirua began in 1999 as a small-scale collaboration between the British conservation NGO Fauna and Flora International (FFI) and the recently established (1997) San Lorenzo (SL) NGO “Niños y Tierras Unidas por el Ambiente” (NYTUA), that partnered to generate attention and resources to combat threats of rapid deforestation in and around what is now the Awacachi Biological Corridor. These threats were being accelerated by the construction of an extension of the South American interoceanic highway that would connect the provinces of Esmeraldas and Imbabura with the ocean and join—in combination with Amazonian waterways—the Pacific and Atlantic oceans (El_Universo_Online, 2002b). As the 156 kilometer extension between the coastal city of San Lorenzo and the Andean city of Ibarra was nearing completion, construction manager Aurelio Hidalgo explained that the highway would connect agricultural, cattle grazing, and forest areas with the national economy, as well as promoting tourism (ibid). The highway was inaugurated in the Imbaburan city of Lita on September 30, 2002 (El_Universo_Online, 2002a), formally opening up access to large extensions of forest—including ancestral afro-Ecuadorian and indigenous Awá lands—to agricultural and other forms of development (López and Echeverría, 2007: 3). According to Hazlewood (Hazlewood, 2012: 131), from 1998 to 2008, the total area of oil palm plantations in Ecuador nearly tripled (from 72,210 to 207,285 hectares), with Esmeraldas accounting for 38% of the national total, and the Canton of San Lorenzo alone increasing its area of oil palm plantations by 80 times—from 276 ha in 1998 to 22,519 hectares in 2007. Today, the landscape has become ‘a seemingly endless sea of oil palms swallowing the ancestral territories of Afro-Ecuadorian and indigenous Awá and Chachi peoples’ (Hazelwood 2012: 131), resulting in four principle social and ecological problems:

- (a) Destruction of native forests and loss of innumerable endemic and/or endangered flora and fauna habitats;
- (b) Contamination of rivers—through improper disposal of agrochemicals and oil palm processing runoff—and resultant health problems for the people of the communities;
- (c) Disposessions of territory and instigation of social conflicts between the historically peaceful indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian communities; and
- (d) Violations of indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian people’s rights to food security and food sovereignty and to living well (Hazlewood, 2012: 130-131).

In response to the impending threats, NYTUA formally requested support of FFI in late 1998 to develop the “Chocó Conservation Corridor” and in 1999¹⁰, FFI began small-scale funding of environmental education activities, as well as outreach activities with other organizations to generate further support for the Chocó initiative. In-depth planning activities for what would become the Awacachi program began in October 1999, with social and biological surveys being conducted by a FFI- headed multi-disciplinary team working alongside both NYUA and members of the communities around the proposed project area. This process culminated in the NYTUA-managed “Iniciativa Paisaje Cotacachi Awa” (IPCA), a large-scale program designed to purchase a corridor of land to protect ‘the rapidly diminishing resource of the Ecuadorian Choco rainforest, maintaining the link between the country’s only large protected areas within this ecoregion’. Land purchase was justified as the key program strategy due to the imminent conversion of high quality forest lowlands (considered the best outside existing protected areas) into African Palm plantations with subsequent problems for resident communities whose land was being bought up for very low prices. FFI therefore decided to compete directly with the logging and palm companies to secure a minimum corridor area of between 8,000 and 10,000 hectares towards the project goal of ‘*conserv[ing] the biodiversity of Northwest Ecuador by establishing and maintaining a biological Corridor between the Cotacachi Cayapas Ecological Reserve and the Awa Ethnic Reserve*’ (see **Figure 9**). Besides land purchases, the project designers also intended to conserve the purchased land through community agreements and enforcement activities, as well as alternative income generation activities, environmental education, and public awareness-raising.

¹⁰ The information in this paragraph is taken from an internal organizational document that contains sensitive information, and is therefore not referenced by name.

Figure 9—Proposed Corridor area



Approximately 10,000 hectares were purchased by NYTUA between 2000–2003, but significant management and accountability problems with NYTUA led FFI to end its relationship with that organization and create the Ecuadorian Awacachi Foundation to receive ownership of and manage the purchased lands (created in 2003, operations began in 2004). In 2005, the Awacachi Foundation’s board of directors formally changed the name to Sirua in response to a challenge by the Awá indigenous federation that it had not granted the use of the name Awá in “Awacachi”. Sirua—meaning “forest” in the indigenous language “Wamuna”—has been the owner and NGO formally in charge of protecting the Awacachi Biological Corridor since 2005.

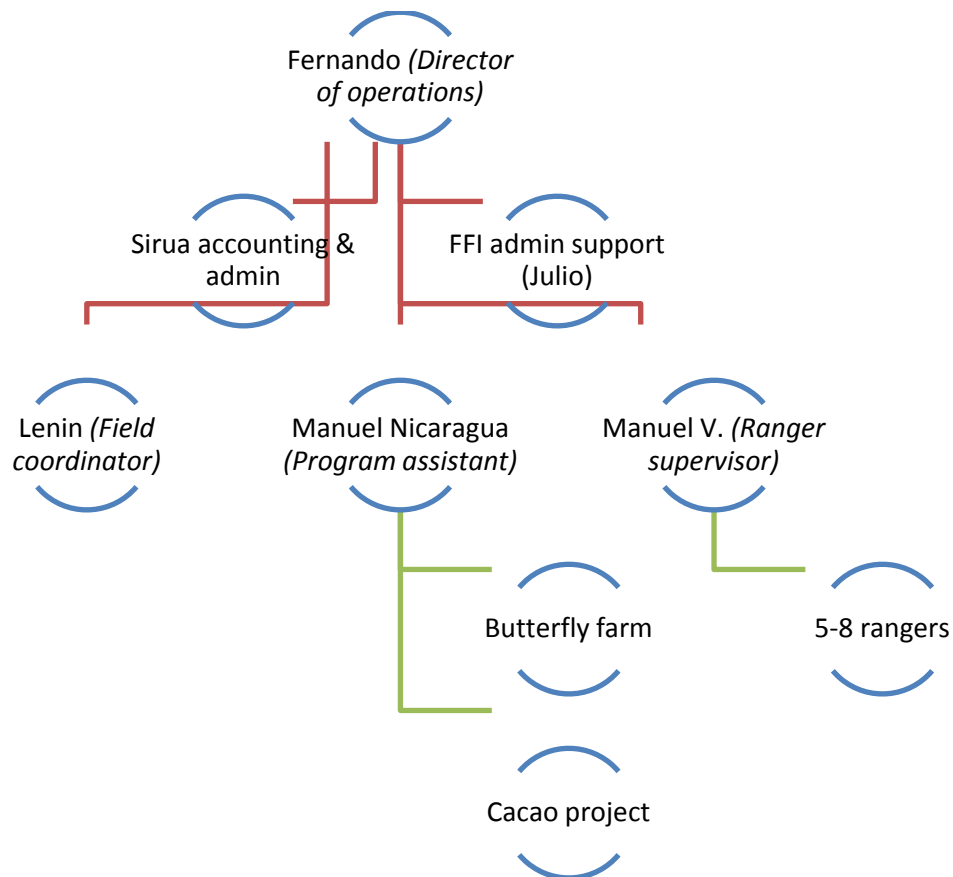
At the time the research process began in June 2009, Sirua worked in the following programmatic areas (in relative order of intensity):

- Corridor protection (surveillance and prosecution of problematic intruders)
- Income generation programs, primarily focused on organic cocoa cultivation and bamboo plantations, researching economic opportunities from butterfly farming, and small-scale support to a local women’s handicrafts groups
- Environmental education and reforestation with local communities
- Community liaising

- Advising local government officials on environmental issues
- Biological research and monitoring
- One-off strategic land purchases

Sirua's field office is located in the city of San Lorenzo, approximately 20 miles from the Corridor, and its management or headquarters office is in Quito, which it shares with FFI (which occupies about half of its office space). Quito is approximately 286 kilometers from San Lorenzo, or five hours by car. Approximately 13 people worked for Sirua full time throughout the action-research process (see **Figure 10**). Fernando was Director of Operations, based out of Sirua's main office in Quito. Fernando receives administrative support from a part-time accountant and office assistant in Quito, and a full-time accountant/office manager in Sirua's field office in San Lorenzo. He also receives significant administrative and technical support from FFI.

Figure 10—Sirua organizational structure in practice during the research period



Sirua's main programmatic activity is conducted through the San Lorenzo field office. At the time of the action-research, this office was headed by Field Coordinator Lenin Boada, whose

main duties were focused on public relations and higher-level community liaising. Although he was nominally in charge of all those who worked in the SL office, in practice, Manuel Nicaragua and Manuel Valencia, respectively, who reported directly to Fernando in Quito, managed Sirua's economic activities, and monitoring and enforcement activities. Between five and eight rangers (depending on funding) conduct the monitoring and enforcement activities of the Awacachi Biological Corridor.

Sirua-FFI motivations for participation and documentation of early challenges

I came to know of Sirua via their main funding partner (and creator) FFI. In our initial back and forth, FFI communicated the following challenge areas as possible areas of focus for the action-research (paraphrased from email from Marianne Carter, Programme Director, Conservation Capacity, to Alfredo, dated April 16, 2009):

- The Sirua Board of Directors has limited initiative to become actively involved and interested in the affairs of FS.
- FFI still act as “parents” of Sirua on many daily management, administrative matters, and on strategic direction. Considering the scope and mission of Sirua for the Awacachi Biological Corridor, Sirua must become more self-sufficient.
- Due to rapid growth over the past five years, difficulties arose with basic institutional structures, and management processes and systems.
- Fundraising capacity needs improvement, and perhaps, the greatest risk to Sirua is its current lack of financial sustainability.

Later that month, we held a conference call from FFI's offices in Cambridge, England with Sirua's director Fernando Echeverria and Julio Bernal and Kerstin Swahn of FFI. From FFI Cambridge present were Alison Gunn (Programme Manager for Central America & Caribbean) and Marianne Carter. In that meeting, we discussed several options and agreed that a general enough fit with Sirua needs and my methodological focus existed to proceed. We also agreed to design the action-research in detail in June 2009, when I would travel to Quito specifically for that purpose (a short trip from Lima, Perú, where I would already be working).

Once in Quito, I conducted six interviews with key staff from both Sirua and FFI, and a Sirua board member. The interviews were intended to surface key organizational challenges that could then be organized into an intentional purpose for the action-research. I used open-ended questions intended to draw out challenges as part of a broader narrative, and only lightly facilitated each interview. The major challenges revealed in the interviews were closely related

to those communicated by FFI in Cambridge in April. Nearly all interviewees confirmed Sirua's lack of a functional board of directors as a fundamental weakness. Additionally, the "parent-child" relationship between FFI and Sirua was prominently mentioned, further revealing that the lines between the two organizations were very blurry. Fernando noted that this situation was in large part a legacy of Sirua's recent "birth". At the time Sirua was created by FFI to manage the Awacachi Biological Corridor, Fernando was hired by FFI to manage the transition from NYTUA to Sirua. According to Fernando, his initial mission was to create a viable structure, which he did with input from FFI's formal representative at the time. However, role confusion existed from the beginning: *"My business card literally said FFI on one side and Awacachi Coordinator on the other side. My boss was in England and the assumption was that the new Foundation was independent; but not really..."* (Fernando). Julio believes this perception still remains because people still think of Sirua's activities *"as if the project was an FFI project rather than a Sirua project. So there is not full ownership by staff because from the outside it's perceived as an FFI project that is being implemented by Sirua...[As such] FFI is expected to resolve things at the end of the day; Sirua is an intermediary"* (Julio). Julio adds that FFI has always played an important role in strategic decisions, and that although a main purpose of FFI since Sirua's inception has been to strengthen Sirua's capacity, until now, "the "big NGO" tends to decide. Sirua dependence on FFI includes financial and administrative dependence, including significant support from Julio on issues outside of his responsibilities as Ecuador program manager.

Interviewees also perceived the challenges facing the Awacachi Biological Corridor and Sirua to be extremely complex and heavily influenced by prior history or "starting conditions". Prevalent amongst these challenges were conflicts with different communities in and around the Corridor. All those interviewed highlighted the fact that Sirua (and previously NYTua) had experienced significant and ongoing conflict with neighboring communities since the time of the land purchases. Fernando gave some insights into the genesis of these problems:

- Both FFI and NYTUA appear to have been preoccupied almost exclusively with land purchases in the early phase of the process. The quick pace of the initial purchasing process appears to have resulted in overlooking what now seem to be obvious problems that would arise with communities.
- Legal challenges. Much of the purchased land (close to 90%) was owned by virtue of its tenants claiming (apparently validly) historical possession, rather than having actual legal title to their lands. Legal challenges have been made on these grounds to recover lands sold. Demands have also been made for repayment at fairer prices for legally purchased lands.

- The director of NYTUA, who was originally from the community, turned much of the purchasing process into private gain, which eventually led to conflicts with communities.

Different interviewees also highlighted larger-scale threats that have existed since before the land purchases. The Awacachi Biological Corridor is known to have gold reserves and has been continually invaded by illegal small-scale mining utilizing destructive techniques. Fernando notes that mining activities are fueled by resource needs in the Colombian civil war, which frequently spills over the border (the Colombian Border is less than 20 miles from the Awacachi Biological Corridor). He and others noted many other threats that exist as well, including logging and wood clearing, in some cases for planting biofuels. Rob noted that this on-the-ground conflict situation continues to shape Sirua, which he feels is under much more pressure than other FFI partners. In addition, Julio confirms that Sirua continues to suffer from past history. *“If Sirua hadn’t inherited this past things would be easier. Dealing with conflicts takes time and money and keeps us from progressing on many fronts”* (Julio).

The last major challenge area identified was Sirua’s response capacity, which was considered by all interviewees to be far from adequate to respond to the Awacachi Biological Corridor’s management challenges. For example, all interviewees considered the number of rangers (between 5–8) to be woefully inadequate for managing the 10,000 hectare reserve. Fernando shared that a study commissioned by Sirua in 2007 estimated that a minimum operating budget of \$300,000 per year would be needed to conduct basic day-to-day protection and economic and community development activities, yet Sirua consistently operates on less than a third of that amount. Julio feels that ranger quality is a capacity issue as well in that they do not add additional value beyond their limited patrolling duties. According to Rob, strategic weaknesses also exist, including focusing almost exclusively on community conflicts to the detriment of developing protection for the Corridor’s integrity. Sirua also has very limited ability to engage with important private sector players near the Corridor (e.g., Palm companies), and has very limited financial capacity. Lastly, board member Sylvia believes Sirua is over-dependent on Fernando, who is overworked and playing multiple roles, while being paid on an inconsistent basis. She feels if he were to leave, Sirua could collapse. In her interview, she summarizes Sirua’s situation as one of incredible vulnerability: *“Sirua is an incredibly vulnerable foundation because it is based almost entirely upon purchased land, with very little functional infrastructure. What else is keeping it going? What is the actual bamboo or butterfly harvest? How many actually go birdwatching; etc.? And with the guerillas next door I really don’t know what Sirua is able to achieve, apart from owning land which we can’t protect”*. She feels

Fernando and his dedication are strengths, but also a weakness. If he could be relieved of some things, he would be a huge strength. *“But with half salary and accountant responsibilities—that’s not what he’s trained for. He’ll burn out”* (Sylvia).

3.5.2.2. Research focus and overall process

Research focus

After completing the interviews, I organized major themes into a mind map that I presented to Fernando, Julio, and Rob to generate feedback. The feedback session flowed into a mini-workshop designed to prioritize the themes and develop an action-research objective. In the workshop, we (Fernando, Julio, Ron and me) clarified that the action-research was meant to primarily benefit Sirua, but also FFI. The process could positively or negatively affect communities as well. Methodologically, the process would be guided by me (Alfredo) and co-facilitator Fabricio Proaño (who was not present), but the majority of the activities would also be supported or conducted by Fernando and Lenin of Sirua, and Julio of FFI. The action-research was expected to produce a strategy that supports Sirua to consolidate the management of the Awacachi Biological Corridor by considering the complex factors that exist in the environment. Additionally, it should increase the motivation and capacity of key personnel who carry out the strategy. This is based on the worldview that ownership by key members of Sirua (including board and staff) is fundamental for conserving the Corridor. It was also noted that funding instability and lack of personnel are possible internal constraints, whereas conflicts with communities, broader regional conflicts, and decisions of the central government are external environmental constraints that must be considered. Additionally, Sirua’s board of directors, Sirua leadership (Fernando), and key FFI personnel, have the power to “throw a wrench in the process” if the process did not consider their perceptions.

This analysis led to the following action-research purpose statement:

Carry out a strategic reflection/planning process to strengthen Sirua’s governance and overall management capacity to conserve the Awacachi Corridor. In addition to developing increased strategic clarity (and a strategic plan as a product) the process should increase a sense of ownership of key actors (e.g. board members, Sirua personnel and community representatives) in Sirua’s mission and activities.

Participant and researcher roles and positionality

As noted above, Fabricio and I held the role of methodological design and facilitation, whereas the most visible on-the-ground leaders for Sirua and FFI (Fernando, Lenin, and Julio) were committed to acting as drivers of the process itself. I clearly cast the process as action-research from the earliest meetings with FFI, and reinforced this idea in a process design document co-developed with Fernando and Julio in August and September 2009. Additionally, in late June 2009, Marianne Carter of FFI participated in a “Capacity Collective”¹¹ workshop to launch Capacity Collective funded action-research processes, and help me situate the upcoming Sirua process within the overall Capacity Collective action-research logic. Finally, in workshops 1 and 2 in October 2009 (see “Key moments and the overall process” below), I explained my desired non-neutral role in the action-research process. In practice, mine and Fabricio’s main roles were as follows:

- Workshop design and facilitation. In general, process participants did not express a desire to participate in the design sessions; rather they essentially left it to us. PDTG leaders Ana and Marco took a much more active role in workshop design than did Sirua/FFI, but neither took on major facilitation roles.
- Overall process design. Since this action-research was the only strengthening process Sirua was participating in during this period, Fabricio and I had to structure the entire process. With PDTG, Juan Carlos and I were responding to needs identified within *their* broader strengthening process. As such, the overall process design was led by PDTG (although we played a prominent role as well).
- Participate in all identity-based methodological moments to get to know the other participants and them us.
- Act as “problematizers”, similar to that done with PDTG
- Produce reports and diagrams, and design tools for follow up use by Sirua to gather more information.
- Conduct accompanying “coaching” visits (Fabricio). Fabricio lives in Quito and made occasional visits to Sirua’s offices to follow through on activities.

Sirua and FFI roles, beyond participation in workshops, included:

- Researching internal documents and conducting multiple analyses to be used in the process and in developing the strategic plan. This included Fernando’s mapping of current ways of working in SL as a method of discovering tacit strategies.

¹¹ The Capacity Collective was an action-research initiative on capacity development being carried out by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

- Co-authoring the strategic plan. Me, Fernando, and Julio, and Fabricio to a lesser extent, spent multiple hours over several months in writing, editing, and finalizing the strategic plan.
- Logistical management of the process

Key moments and the overall process

An internal report systematizing key moments of Sirua's history listed three strategic phase since 2000:¹²

- 1) *Establishment of the Corridor (2000–2003)*, in which the main activities were centered on securing and legalizing land purchases, setting up basic protection activities, developing projects and proposals to fund specific initiatives (e.g., research, microenterprises, community relations, environmental education, etc.), and awareness-raising with communities and other local actors.
- 2) *Legitimizing the Corridor and its programs (2004–2007)*, which included implementing a more integrated systems for administering and protecting the Corridor, as well as conducting projects that had been successfully funded. Importantly, this phase also included significant conflict resolution of social and legal conflicts that had been generated as a result of the land purchases.
- 3) *Increasing organizational management autonomy (2007–2010)*. During this phase, FS began contracting more of its own staff (including a director and staff in San Lorenzo) and relying less directly on FFI than before. This included developing a conservation financing strategy for the Corridor and securing several funded projects directly as Sirua. Although the action-research was not conceived of with this in mind, it is helpful to situate it in relation to these other phases. The AR fits in time and focus with this third phase.

After defining the action-research focus, Fabricio and I conducted five major and four “mini” workshops from October 2009 through June 2010, in addition to several meetings, multiple emails, and desk work to finish the strategic plan through late 2010. Workshops and field visits were conducted in Quito and San Lorenzo, and involved staff from both offices, two Sirua board members, FFI regional staff from its Quito office, FFI-Cambridge staff (in two workshops), community representatives, an NGO partner, and representatives from Ecuador's ministry of environment.

¹² López and Echeverría (2007) include phase 1 in Sirua's history in spite of the fact that they did not formally exist as an organization until 2003. During all three phases, however, FFI has served as a conductive thread, giving logic to López and Echeverría's inclusion of this phase.

The first phase of the action-research consisted of initial outreach activities between me and representatives of FFI in Cambridge from mid-2008 and mid-2009, several interviews to frame the initial action-research purpose, and the aforementioned design session in June 2009. This phase culminated in a process purpose document and plan. The full-blown process began in October 2009 with the following workshops:

- Workshop 1 (October 2009, Ibarra)—“*Mapping strategic themes*”—was designed to conduct a situational analysis of the prominent themes and actors that affect the Awacachi Biological Corridor, from the perspectives of different stakeholders. Specifically, the workshop purpose was to find out: “*What is the Corridor, how is it perceived differently by different actors and what conditions are needed to conserve it?*”. We (Fabricio and I, in agreement with Fernando and Julio) also wanted to obtain a better idea of the drivers of change in the Corridor, better understand key actors and relationships, and surface ideas about what the characteristics and conditions of a sustainably managed Corridor might be.
- Workshop 2 (October, Quito)—“*Generating the basis for strategic planning*”—was intended to process “strategically” the information from WS 1, and continue exploration into important themes. We (the participants under the guidance of Fabricio and me) were essentially attempting to improve and polish (better package) the inputs from WS1.

At the end of my visit in October, we conducted “Mini-Workshop 3”—“*Understanding Sirua San Lorenzo*”—in Sirua’s offices in San Lorenzo. The intention was to map differences in the way this office saw the Awacachi Biological Corridor and Sirua’s challenges, which led to “Mini-workshop 4”—“*Presentation of initial results*”—a half day meeting in Quito two days after the SL workshop intended to present mine and Fabricio’s perspectives on what was emerging from the process thus far. In that meeting, we shared our own surprise about Sirua’s level of activity in SL, as well as many mixed perceptions that SL participants had shared with us. The overall effect was an agreement to prioritize deeper involvement of SL staff and to more generally “shift the center of gravity” of the action-research from Quito to San Lorenzo to include planning a workshop in SL as a specific follow through action. The “*San Lorenzo turn*” consisted of workshops 3 and 4 mentioned above, and the following three major moments:

- Workshop 5 (December 2009, San Lorenzo)—“*Recovering knowledges and experiences in San Lorenzo*”—designed to map the talent of the SL office, and formally recognize the

experiences of San Lorenzo personnel. This workshop would include Julio and Fernando's first joint participation in a meeting in SL (Julio of FFI had never been to SL offices before)

- Mini-Workshop 6 (March 2010, San Lorenzo)—“*Analysis of organizational culture*”—focused on better understanding the unique cultural characteristics of the SL office, as well as better understand the work of the park guards.
- SL field visit and Corridor walk. On the same trip as WS 6, Julio, Fernando, Fabricio, and I, along with some external FFI-related guests, visited the Corridor and trudged with the rangers through the deep mud and windy trails. The purpose was to obtain a better idea of the actual fieldwork of the rangers.

The final phase of the process was focused on improving and finalizing the strategic plan and conducting some initial reflection on the action-research process itself:

- Workshop 7 (March 2010, Quito)—“*Presentation of the draft strategic plan and improvement of assumptions*”
- Workshop 8 (June 2010)—“*Strategic plan finalization and formal end of the action-research*”—dedicated to developing a “system” for using the strategic plan as a guiding mechanism for programmatic implementation, as well as to reflect on the overall action-research process.
- Mini-Workshop 9 (June 2010)—“*FFI regional meeting*”—FFI director Fernando Echeverria and I presented the interim findings of the action-research process at FFI's regional meeting

In December 2011, we were able to conduct a mini-systematization of the action-research experience in Quito. I was in town for other reasons and Fernando was thoughtful enough to convene several staff from both institutions to participate in a one-day workshop designed to allow action-research process participants to interpret the meaning of the process from their own perspectives.

In addition to these formal moments, significant activity (e.g., calls, email and desk work primarily) occurred throughout the action-research in developing the strategic plan in detail, in coordinating moments and workshops, and in sharing progress and generating feedback between Fernando Echeverria and Julio, on the FS/FFIs side, and Fabricio Proaño and me on behalf of my PhD process. This also included various meetings in Quito between Fabricio and FS staff. Similar to PDTG, in this dissertation I concentrate primarily on the workshops mentioned above

because my research is focused on better understanding how methodology can be used to help organizations grapple with complexity, and the workshops generated the data most indicative of my methodological experimentation. That said, in the different chapters, I have attempted to build up a more holistic picture of that which emerged cumulatively from the overall process.

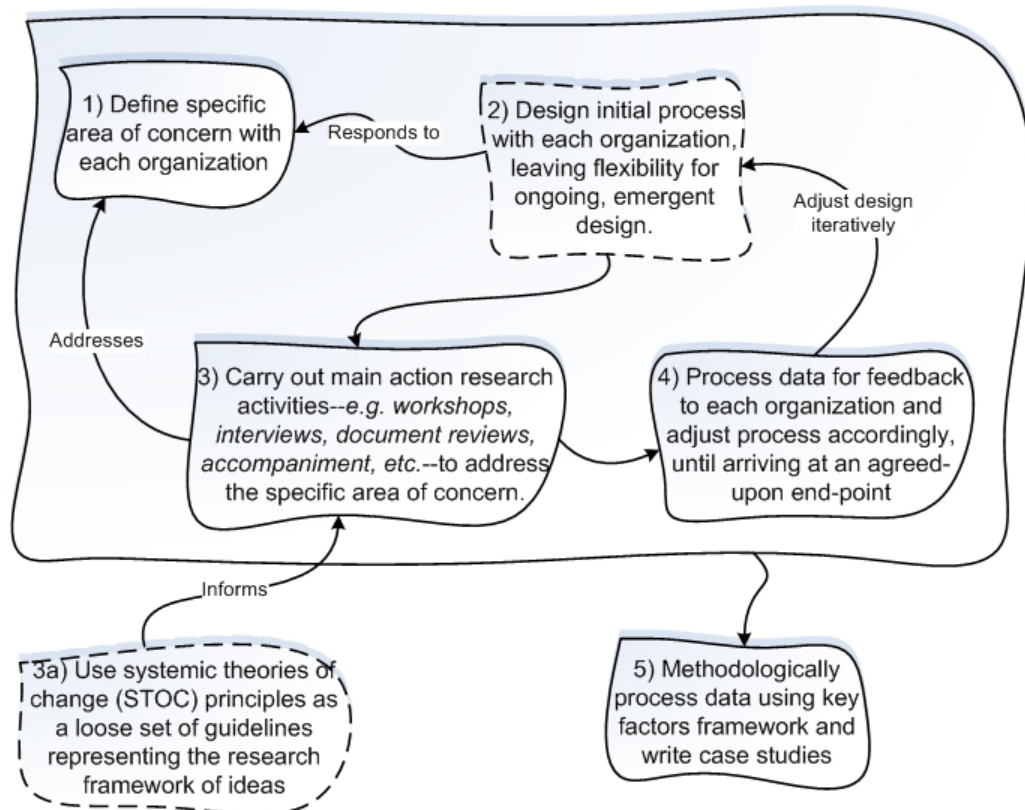
3.5.2.3. Main capacity outputs

The action-research produced an internal, an external, and a concise marketing version of a strategic plan, along with many workshop and process reports (all in Spanish). For now, I end by noting that programmatic, relational, and “community relations and integration”, emerge amongst the most important capacities for dealing with Sirua’s complexity.

3.6. Overall research methodology summarized

My overall methodology consisted of the action areas shown in **Figure 11**, which I now briefly describe. The numbers have been added in the diagram for purposes of explanation, not because of linear flow:

Figure 11—Overall research methodology



1 – Agree upon a specific area of concern (action-research interest) with particular organizations

As explained earlier in each case, we (me, Juan Carlos and / or Fabricio, with each organization) developed action-research objectives specific to each organization. Although we “pre-identified” the specific action-research interests with organizational leaders in both cases, we did not assume that these objectives would be meaningful to the other process participants, or that they were perfectly understood by the leaders and facilitators when they were developed. We therefore made an effort to clarify, enrich, or redefine the focus of the action-research process in the first major workshop. By “sweeping in” additional key perspectives before “diving in”, I believe we (process facilitators) increased the chances that the process would be meaningful.

2 – Design the initial set of activities with each organization, leaving flexibility for ongoing, emergent design

Once we had a basic mandate for action with specific process objectives, we designed the process in consultation with each organization. With Sirua, we, as facilitators, were given the main responsibility for design, but in the case of PDTG organizational leaders, participated more actively in the ongoing methodological design process. In all cases, we planned key workshops, but left open much of the design for unknown future moments in which particular subthemes would emerge. These themes did emerge and new workshops, meetings, information gathering, document reviews, and other actions followed.

3 – Carry out action-research activities to address the specific area of concern.

We (process participants with the facilitation of Juan Carlos, Fabricio and me) carried out action-research, primarily via interviews, workshops, accompaniment/field visits, focus groups, document reviews, systematization of experiences, report writing, and presentations. We used STOC principles (see 3.3.2) as a loose set of guidelines for maintaining a critical, systemic capacity-building focus that reflected the intentionality of my research questions. I provide more detailed explanations of the most emblematic methods used in the empirical/analysis (Chapters 4-7).

4 – Process data for feedback to each organization and adjust process accordingly, until arriving at an agreed-upon end-point.

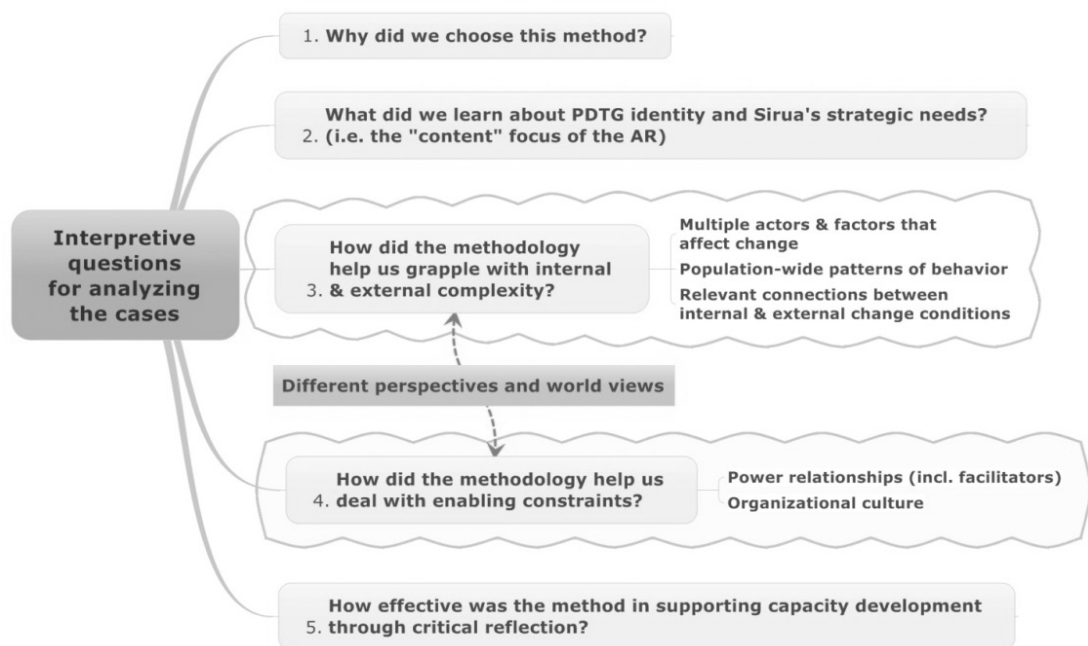
This action refers to how my co-researchers and I processed data primarily for the purposes of feedback to Sirua and PDTG, in relation to their specific areas of concern. In other words, at this

point, we (facilitators) are not so much focused on processing data in relation to the research questions, but in relation to each organization's specific process. We produced workshop "memorias" (like minutes) that contain literally the things that result from each workshop, as well as reports that include some level of facilitator analysis. In some cases, we receive feedback from members of each organization before finalizing reports.

5 – Methodologically process data using "key factors framework" and write case studies and dissertation

The activities described in #3 and #4 above produced codable research data in the form of workshop design documents, notes, digital recordings and transcripts of key interviews and workshops, workshop products and reports, and personal notes. This data was produced from approximately 15 workshops, multiple interviews, meetings, and Skype calls. To interpret the data, I designed what I call a "key factors framework" (see **Figure 12**). I used these questions to process the data in both cases. I used Nvivo for initial coding in each case, and also used mind maps extensively for coding.

Figure 12—Methodological interpretation "key factors" framework



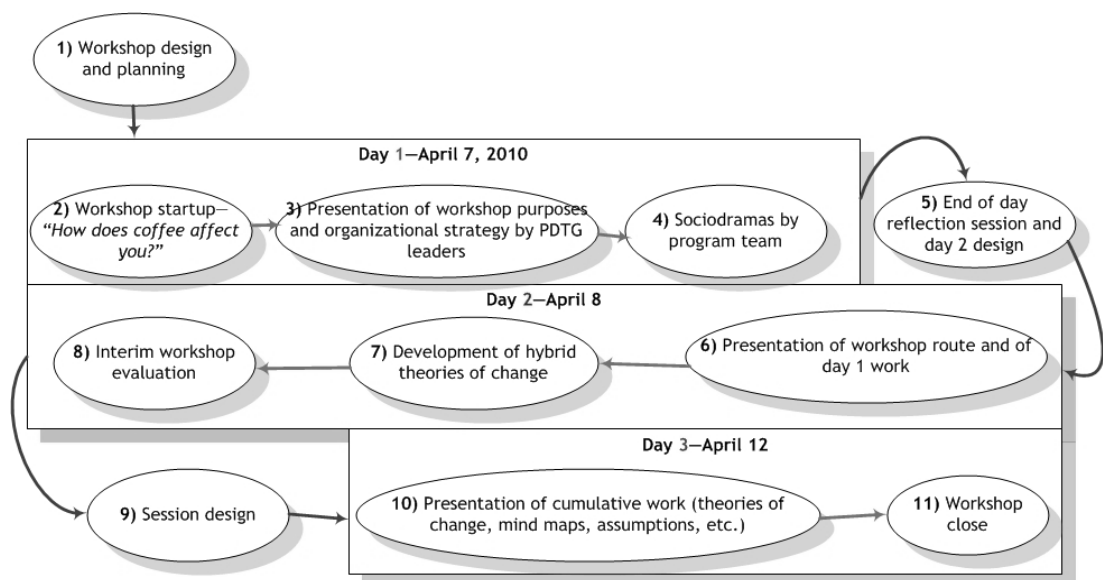
My specific analysis process was as follows:

- Conduct a detailed analysis of all data related to each major moment. For example, in analyzing “The Cluny Workshops”—moment 3 of the PDTG process—I used the five

questions above to analyze in detail the recordings and transcripts (in conjunction with my notes) of all workshop “sub-moments” (sub-moments shown in **Figure 13**, taken from the processed report). I literally asked the five questions from **Figure 12** of each of the major sub-moments listed in **Figure 13**. I then produced a polished report in Spanish that included the actual results from the mix of workshops, meetings and other activities, and my analysis of the results based on the key factors framework. At this point, my analysis did not attempt to weave in existing theory beyond that which I was already conversant with “in my head”.

After conducting this analysis (with some variations) on all major action-research process moments, in both cases, I had a well-processed package of data that could be used for developing case studies.

Figure 13—Major sub-moments from the Cluny workshops



- Write case studies. I wrote detailed case studies of each experience in English (all my own translations), drawing from the analysis described above. These case studies focused both on “content”—i.e., that which was valuable to each organization—and methodological process, which was the focus of my research. I primarily used mind-maps to organize my data for the PDTG case, because less data was available and simply because I found it more practical to do so. For Sirua, I used Nvivo because many more moments existed to process.

- Organize themes from cases into likely chapters and develop empirical/analytic chapters: I essentially took the most important findings from both case studies, grouped them, and then searched for a way to present them in a narrative form in which some level of cumulative story could emerge for each case. This would be difficult considering the constraints of an 80,000 word dissertation, but imperative, considering the nature of my research (see section 3.4.1 “why cases?”). As I developed each chapter, I incorporated relevant theory to generate needed dialogue. This step was important considering I combined my empirical evidence with my analysis within the same chapters.
- Write articles based on my research as the opportunities presented themselves. Throughout my process, I wrote or co-wrote a series of articles and published reports that helped me frame my approach or make sense of my data (see: Taylor and Ortiz, 2008, Ortiz Aragón and Giles Macedo, 2010, Ortiz Aragón, 2012, Ortiz Aragón, 2010a, Ortiz Aragón, 2010b, Ortiz and Taylor, 2009, Burns et al., 2012).

Thus far, in this chapter, I have presented a detailed explanation of my methodological approach. I now present an introduction to the empirical/analysis chapters so that the reader may follow the narrative logic more clearly.

3.7. Introduction to empirical analysis chapters

3.7.1. Organizing the empirical/analysis chapter logic and flow

As noted earlier, Complex Responsive Processes (CRP) theory takes communicational narrative and the patterns therein that organize experience as the main “content” areas in which complexity can be explored. As such, my dissertation looks to the patterns of communication that emerged throughout my research process—in relation to the methodology used—as its main source of data. Chapters 4–7 combine my analysis with empirical data, including the incorporation of relevant theory. Consistent with case studies (Stake, 2005, Flyvbjerg, 2007), I present the four chapters primarily in narrative form, using, to the extent possible, participant conversations to “tell the story”. Each of the four chapters is designed to present different learning outcomes from my (empirical) research process in dialogue with complex responsive processes theory (CRP), or SST. In the following table, I present the logic of these four combined empirical/analysis chapters:

Chapter	Focus	Source
Chapter 4: <i>Multiple ways of knowing generates diversity and shifts organizational communication</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Basic relationships between methodology (as intervention) and the emergence of complex responsive process of human relating. <i>This is important simply to set up or frame how methodology is related to complex responsive processes theory via communicational processes. It is premature and would be overly complex to add in learning theory, power relations, and other key elements of my research findings at this point.</i> – Specific reflections on how different methods that utilize different ways of knowing affect complex responsive processes differently. <i>This is a unique area of research findings that begins to demonstrate how ways of knowing may provide multiple doorways to personal and group identity, and how this diverse identity may help shift patterns of human relating.</i> 	<p>For this chapter, I draw solely on the PDTG case, which I felt lent itself well to “setting up” the overall analysis.</p>
Chapters 5 and 6: <i>Capacity emerges as shifts in patterns of communicative interaction</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How learning, as a form of capacity development, occurs in complex responsive processes of human relating. <i>This is important because it connects “capacity-building” methodology to learning within complex responsive processes theory. Without a theory of learning, I posit that we have no basis on which to claim that capacity development may occur.</i> – How different methods and methodological approaches generate learning differently. <i>This is again a unique area of research findings that details how three different methodological combinations affect patterns of communication differently, even while they share some similar attributes.</i> 	<p>In Chapter 5, I draw on the Sirua case to present two examples.</p> <p>In Chapter 6, I return to PDTG for the third example. It is imperative to show “learning examples” of both cases.</p>
Chapter 7: <i>Power relationships condition the patterns of communicative interaction that emerge in each case</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How power relations affect the conditions for learning and change in complex environments. <i>This is important because all methodological use is a form of “power relating,” as are all behaviors of those who participate in methodological processes. A theory of power relating is necessary, in part, to understand better the politics of how capacities may or may not develop, as well as the broader conditions that may affect learning in complex environments.</i> 	<p>I begin the chapter with an example from the Sirua case. I conclude the chapter with an example from the PDTG case.</p>

Each chapter builds on the previous chapter in the sense that the outcomes from previous chapters are assumed to be present in new chapters as well. Additionally, each chapter introduces a bit of additional theory relevant to the new concepts being introduced:

Chapter 4: *Action research and extended epistemologies*

Chapter 5: *Organizational learning (also applies to Chapter 6)*

Chapter 6: *Soft Systems methodology (more depth from that which is presented in Chapter 2)*

Chapter 7: *Power relations*

It was important to include this additional theory in the empirical/analysis chapters themselves and not in the literature review or methodology chapters because in this way, it makes it possible for me to build the narrative picture iteratively —i.e., “construct” the story. To be clear, however, I do not introduce any new “bodies” of theory, but unpack key elements of CRP theory, Soft Systems theory and action research theory.

In **Chapter 8**, I conclude the dissertation with a presentation of research findings, drawing from all four empirical/analysis chapters. That chapter summarizes the findings, unpacks them a bit, and then concludes with some open-ended implications for capacity development.

3.7.2. *Formatting and voice in Chapters 4–7*

My empirical data is mostly in the form of transcribed participant comments and conversations. However, given that Chapters 4–7 combine empirical data with analysis, three voices in the overall narrative appear:

- Me (Alfredo) as a narrator of that which emerged from the process empirically
- “*Participant voices and analysis during the action-research process*”
- Me (Alfredo) as interpreter and analyst of what came out

To distinguish between these three voices, I have adhered to the following procedure:

- In my narration role, I leave the text in regular font. I aim not to introduce analysis in this role.
- My analysis is always either under a sub-heading called “analysis” or in a single-tabled box like this one. Additionally, all analysis is in the unique Font “Verdana” (as used here)

- Participant voices and analysis are always in “*double quotation marks and italics*”
When included in my analysis, they are also in Verdana font.

I have also included the following table on the first page of Chapters 4–8 as a reminder.

Chapter formatting key

Voice	Formatting
Alfredo as narrator of empirical data	Text in regular Times New Roman font
Alfredo as interpreter and analyst	Verdana font and either under a sub-heading called “analysis” or in a single-cell table.
Participant voices	“ <i>Double quotation marks and italics</i> ” When included in my analysis, they are also in Verdana font.

4. Multiple ways of knowing generates diversity and shifts organizational communication

Chapter formatting key

Voice	Formatting
Alfredo as narrator of empirical data	Text in regular Times New Roman font
Alfredo as interpreter and analyst	Verdana font and either under a sub-heading called "analysis" or in a single-cell table.
Participant voices	"Double quotation marks and italics" When included in my analysis, they are also in Verdana font.

4.1. Introduction and chapter focus

In this chapter, I share examples from the PDTG case that illustrate how the use of reflexive methodologies that incorporate multiple ways of knowing was effective in revealing significant complexity. These methodologies also contribute to important shifts in organizational communication that will be present throughout the action-research experience. In particular, I share how two exercises that focus on *personal* identity and change help surface *organization-level* complexity and challenges, which leads to the development of objectives for the PDTG action-research process. The "personal change spiders" and "changes in residence" exercises reveal much about individual identity and change strategies, while also revealing: a) a high-stress, negative work environment within PDTG, which is influenced by its militant culture, and b) an organizational identity largely based on strong individual personalities and not a collective vision. Methodologically, I explain:

- How complex identity emerges as people enable and constrain each other in reflective conversation that is instigated, but not caused, by the exercises
- How conversations about how we as individuals are socially conditioned over time (spider exercise), or about how people experience culture shock between places of residence (change in residence exercise), provide a "natural" bridge into conversations about how individuals navigate their identities when they enter PDTG's emerging organizational culture.

Both of these exercises occurred during the first PDTG workshop, which was intended to surface ideas and issues that would inform the formulation of action-research objectives. In **section 4.4.**, I share another example—a staged organizational debate from the second

workshop—that allows me to present a fuller picture of the relationships between the methodology and the themes that emerged in the first two workshops.

4.2. Incorporation of multiple “ways of knowing” via an important methodological fusion

As noted in **section 3.4.2.**, “knowing” in action-research is said to be more valid when grounded in experience, expressed through our stories, images and full range of senses, enriched through theories which make sense to us, and expressed in worthwhile action in our lives (Heron and Reason, 2008: 367). This concept is part of a “holistic” theory of learning behind AR, which includes involving the whole person—‘a being that is physical, perceptual, affective, cognitive (intellectual, imaginative, intuitive), conative (exercising the will), social, political and spiritual’—in research processes (Heron, 1999: 23). Heron, citing origins in general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968), notes that “person” as a “whole” being emerges from the integration and interaction of these different elements within and between people (Heron, 1999).

Going into my field research, I did not intend to apply concepts of multiple ways of knowing or “extended epistemologies” beyond the generic notion of utilizing “creative, participatory methods”. I did, however, explicitly intend to find ways to examine deeply seated individual worldviews, power relationships, and organizational culture as key influencers of organizational capacity (as noted in STOC principles—**section 3.3.2.**). Going into the design of the first workshop I had some basic ideas on how to conduct culture and power analyses through SSM (known as analyses 2 and 3 in SSM). To complement this, my co-facilitator Juan-Carlos Giles suggested we incorporate some thinking and techniques from the methodology Reflect Action (R/A), which he felt could address some of my methodological concerns while lending “transformational potential” to the process. R/A is an approach that seeks ‘the empowerment and autonomy of people and organizations, with the objective of achieving personal and social transformations’ (Giles Macedo and Abad, 2009: 1, my translation). The version of R/A practiced by Juan-Carlos is an offshoot of “Reflect”, which was originally developed by the UK NGO Action-Aid as a way to link adult literacy to empowerment by combining Friereian adult literacy approaches with Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) (Archer, 2007: 16). Juan-Carlos’ argument was that the critical subjective reflective practices that R/A embodied could be transformational at an individual level because they can help examine and reconstruct personal history, traumas, fears, passions, strengths, weaknesses, self-esteem, and other areas of individual identity, *in relation to others* in an organization. This concept includes a critical examination of the roles we as individuals play in unhealthy power relationships and cultural

(understood broadly) practices, including conscientização—i.e., becoming politically aware of broader social change issues (Friere, 1970, 1993). He felt R/A could uniquely address these issues because it uses a focus called “senti-cuerpo-pensante (SCP)” (feeling/embodiment (touch)/thinking) that uses emotions, sensations and thoughts to understand identities, motivations and barriers to change better at personal, organizational and societal levels (Giles Macedo and Abad, 2009: 1-2). I had always intended to use participatory methods in the action-research, but R/A with a “SCP” focus might go much further because of its ability to access more doorways into people’s identities and motivations than could more rational methods. Furthermore, R/A also places facilitator worldviews and power relations on the table for reflective examination, lending more coherence to an action-research approach.

I have re-introduced the concept of multiple ways of knowing because of my decision to incorporate elements of R/A—an approach based on expanding ways of knowing—into my research. I now share exercises from the PDTG case that exemplify multiple ways of knowing and their connections to complex responsive processes theory.

4.3. Exercises that use multiple ways of knowing help frame the PDTG action research objectives

The first PDTG workshop was designed to develop specific action-research process objectives. We carried out the following exercises over the two days of the workshop (but only designed the first day’s activities in order to plan day two based on what would emerge in the first day):

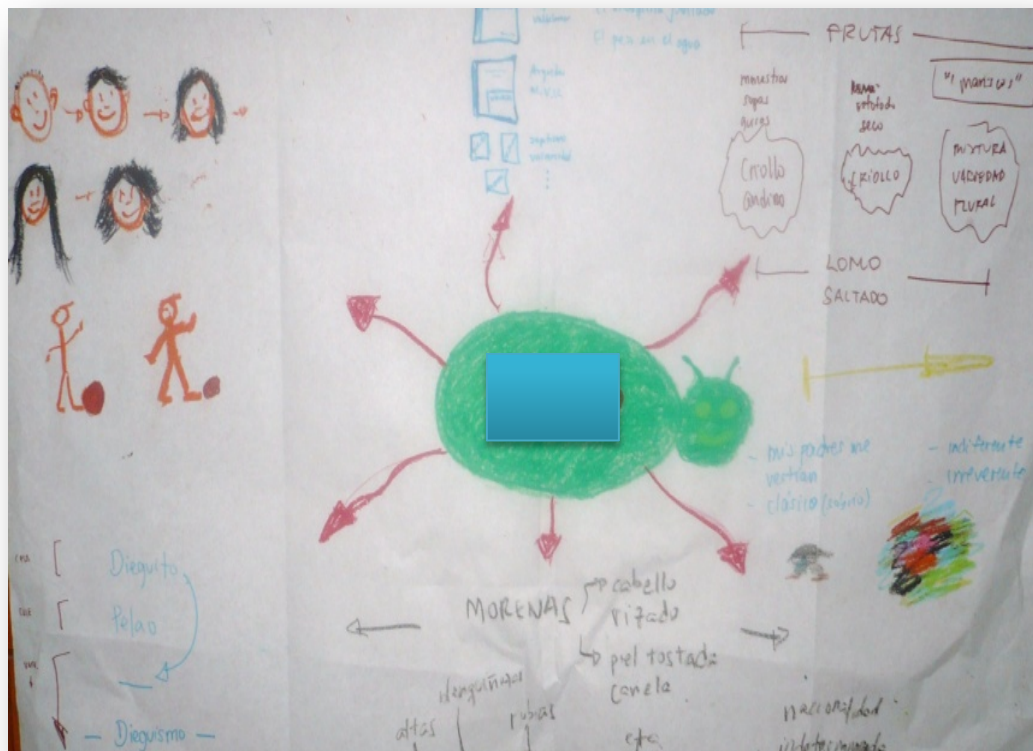
- 1) Personal change spiders (d1)
- 2) Rich picture drawings of PDTGs current challenges (d1)
- 3) Analysis of the personal effects of major moves (changes in residence) (d2)
- 4) Organizing of PDTG challenges (d2)
- 5) San Miguel “kidnapping” exercise (d2)
- 6) Development of AR objectives (d2)

Moments 1-3 generated the content needed to define the AR objectives, whereas moments 4-6 were mostly focused on organizing that content into inputs to develop AR process objectives. In the remainder of **section 4.3** I focus on methodological moments 1 and 3, which were the two exercises that generated the most initial content that was reflected in the subsequent AR objective that emerged (as presented in **section 3.5.1**).

4.3.1. *Getting to know the people in the room?—personal change spiders*

We (Juan Carlos and me) began the workshop with a reflective exercise meant to help participants and facilitators get to know each other better and to start grappling with the idea of *complex* change. In the exercise, we asked each participant to draw a six-legged spider and indicate on each leg changes in 1) reading preferences, 2) the way people call you or you call yourself, 3) clothing style, 4) physical appearance, 5) food preferences, and 6) friends or preferences in “romantic” tastes in partner. After all had finished their drawings, all participants (including facilitators) shared them in pairs and then in an overall plenary. **Figure 14** is a visual of one of the participant’s (Diego’s) change spider. **Box 2** contains some processed results from different change spiders.

Figure 14—Patricio’s change spider



Box 2—Selected changes in tastes in reading, food, friends and partners taken from the spiders

Marco used to read adventure books before transitioning to Dutch, European and Latin American literature, and then history, politics and sociology. **Katy** started with short stories and fables, and later, ghost stories. In college, she had to read textbooks but eventually reverted to novels, including her current interest in mystics like Paolo Coelho. **Juan Carlos** first liked historical novels, and then stopped reading, and became more involved with documentaries and comedies (movies), particularly Woody Allen. **José** used to read books for fun but now concentrates more on books related to the study in sociology and development, child labor, social movements, and sexual diversity. **Ana** used to read poems by Vallejo, Fahrenheit 454, the Bible, the five theses of Mao, historical materialism, and sociology. More recently, she has been reading cultural studies, psychoanalysis, feminisms, realist magic, newspapers, and biographies. **Patricio** used to read short stories and classical novels by Argueta and Valderrama, and more recently read... “the retired anarchist” and “A fish in water.” **Alfredo** used to read adventure books like the Hardy Boys and then became interested in Ayn Rand in his early twenties, when he started developing a real intellectual curiosity for the first time. That is when he started becoming interested in reading history and international affairs, and in literature, Dostoevsky.

Regarding changes in tastes in food and preferences in friends and partners, participants reflected:

- I’ve always been more interested in dark Latinas although I always ended up with blondes (Marco)
- From light-skinned boys with blue eyes, to tall boys who played sports; but I care about their ability to communicate and have a plan for the future (Katy)
- In friends, I went from being a cool eclectic type with a collection of nerd, jock and outsiders friends, to a more “legitimate” collection of professional friends—“what has happened to me?” (Alfredo)
- From sweets and sodas to healthy food, vegetables and water. Then to traditional Peruvian food, but also pizza (Katy)

During the plenary session, participants shared how they had felt happiness, nostalgia and curiosity to know more about each other’s experiences and histories, and also tension due to the emotional imbalance that changes have sometimes provoked in their lives. The drawings also led to reflections on how our (“the participants”) identities are heavily socially conditioned at home, work, and in society at large, e.g.:

- *“I’m more aware of the multiple factors that influence human change—social pressure, upbringing, fears, passions, experiences, self-esteem, curiosity.*
- *This activity shows how weak we are to allow our identities to be so influenced—many of us are not aware of the changes, which can determine us too much and make us lose our identity.*
- *There are many pressures in all the spaces in which we live to not be too different from the norm*
- *In professional spaces in particular, social conditioning can be so strong that we end up revealing very limited—i.e. distilled or purified, mature, non-emotional, superficial—versions of our selves, when in reality we are actually complex and interesting people.*

- *The non-diverse professional worker is said to know who he or she is because she doesn't stick out—she fits in.*
- *This conditioning occurs through friends and family also, not just at work.”*

Additional reflections arose concerning the implications of social conditioning. Some felt that anytime we as people change our identities to satisfy demands in our environment, we truncate our “real” identity, whereas others felt that we naturally have multiple identities and our adaptability in moving between identities is what allows us to have a broader understanding of diversity.

After initial reflections, Juan-Carlos Giles, who was facilitating, asked if there might be any relationship between the themes emerging in the discussion and the reason we were gathered together in the workshop. Ricardo began by noting that he feels an implicit expectation exists that individuals support the idea that PDTG is a space in which *militants* come together collectively to support social movement causes. He affirms that indeed PDTG members display militant behaviors in protest marches and in different events. However, within PDTG, he feels a collective militant “project” is lacking because individualism reigns over collective interests. This “militant behavior”, according to Ricardo, actually generates a stressful work environment, which is made worse when others do not do their part. He provides as an example the recent editing and publishing process of the book “Mining and Territory” in which he feels his heavy load was not recognized by others and a stressful environment made what could have otherwise been a positive process, less enjoyable. As he was “working his ass off”¹³ he tried to obtain some simple anecdotes about recent PDTG events to be able to add to their website (another of his responsibilities), and even after meeting about it with those responsible, he received nothing. *“I feel upset because I’m killing myself and others don’t do their part”* (Ricardo). As such, he resorts to a work strategy of “punching the clock” and working hard, but not worrying about the broader organization.

Mariana attributes the stressful environment and lack of organizational commitment to lax leadership and introduces a worldview that Peruvians need to be supervised by dictatorial styles to perform. She offers an anecdote about when she first arrived at her previous job at an indigenous federation, and encountered what she felt was an authoritarian leader. However, in spite of his authoritarian style, he was also inspirational and clearly communicated

¹³ I am responsible for all translations from English to Spanish. Many times, a literal translation would not have made sense in English, and so I looked for the closest equivalent that occurred to me.

organizational purpose to people, and thus generated commitment. When a more lax leader came in later, people started to relax and take advantage. She concludes: “*With the authoritarian we do our work, but with the flexible boss we don’t*”, to which Ricardo responds, “*Peruvian Style*”. Mariana: “*They say that’s how we Peruvians are*”. Ricardo: (affirming) “*That’s true*”. Under leader A, she used to work weekends because she was convinced of the mission, but with leader B, she feels it was a problem that people got paid whether they generated their outputs or not.

Juan-Carlos and I challenge some of Mariana’s assumptions. I note that the belief that better performance can only be had through the application of sticks and carrots, delivered through an authoritarian style, closely mirrored Macgregor’s theory X, which has been widely challenged in HR theory as a source of motivation. “*If we go into a situation with that belief we will develop management systems that satisfy that worldview*” (Alfredo). In addition, Juan-Carlos notes the authoritarian leader also made the effort to sell the organization’s mission to the people and get them to buy in. In Mariana’s own example, she works weekends not because he is authoritarian but because she believed in the work she was doing, in part due to his charisma and clear communication. To which Mariana responds: “*What has the Program¹⁴ done to convince people to believe in militancy—beyond salary? Up until now I haven’t seen it... What unites us to have militancy as the focus of PDTG?*” (Mariana).

Ricardo affirms the view of PDTG as scattered militants with individual causes, lacking a common project that holds them together (an argument that he started), and adds his fear that the only thing holding them together is PDTG director Marco: “*If Marco were to leave, ciao goes PDTG*”. Simona takes this argument further by sharing her personal story of initial contact with PDTG and her belief that PDTG lacks a collective identity beyond the roles Marco and Ana play: “*At first I thought the Program did have an identity... Ana and Marco received me and gave me a tour; I saw all the paintings on the walls, the posters—everything seemed really fun and made me feel comfortable and I thought ‘cool, I want to participate and work with them’.* Then, along the way I realized that no, they didn’t have the identity that I had first thought. Because I realized that the personalities are very strong; the individuals prevail over the collective of the Program” (Simona). She agrees with Ricardo that if Marco and Ana were to leave the Program, it would probably not continue. She then adds that organizational discourse to the outside world comes into contradiction with how personal relations actually

¹⁴ A reminder to the reader: PDTG—Program for Democracy and Global Transformation—is commonly referred to as “The Program”, not referring to a specific program but to the overall organization. I have preserved the use of “The Program” in participants’ language, but am referring to PDTG.

play out within the organization. She feels that even simple things such as the fact that most people leave the kitchen dirty and do not bother to wash their dishes, is indicative of individualist thinking (uncomfortable laughter). This belief leads to further affirmations from Mariana echoing Simona and highlighting the contradictions between espoused and actual organizational practices: *“People ask me ‘what is the Program’ and I tell them about working with social movements. We recently circulated an email with the principles of the Program, but in practice we don’t do it”* (Mariana).

Additional day one reflections—an elephant in the room

We had started day one of the workshop late and after the personal spiders we only had time for one more major exercise (rich picture drawings of the challenging situation as PDTG members perceived it) and an end-of-day reflection session. In that session, organizational leaders Marco and Ana, who had not been able to participate in the workshop until now, brought up how they felt recent conflictual departures of key staff were emotionally affecting some participants, and the workshop overall. Marco framed the moment as both complicated and interesting, because while ruptures (referring to the current situation with Roberta and Edwin—see **section 3.5.1.1.**) have occurred, continuities and new possibilities are also present. *“I think we need to be together with this feeling of pain and sadness, but on the other hand hope and optimism, ...or at least try because the feelings of sadness and pain can be very strong. But I’m looking forward to tomorrow to delve into these important issues”* (Marco). Ana picks up the reflection by noting that the current conflicts in PDTG are causing her a lot of mental anguish. The first thing she noticed when she walked in to the workshop was the absence of people she was used to seeing over the last three years: *“When I saw Edwin leave it made me really sad (she starts crying) because these are personal, not just professional absences. And they are putting a mark on this moment in the Program, because in spite of the problems, difficulties and fighting, we have also developed friendships”* (Ana). She adds that although she is having a hard time, she is also hopeful the process will help things to turn out well, *“because every process is a new road, a new pathway that we are generating with the people who are with us now”* (Ana).

Although we only made initial progress on day 1, participants were aware that day 2 would continue to build on day 1 advances to develop action-research objectives (again, the purpose of this workshop). I conclude this subsection with the following questions regarding identity put forth by PDTG participants during the initial reflection plenary after the spider drawings (they were written on cards), which highlight some of the complex issues with which the group is grappling:

- “What are the determinants of our current organizational identity (and what is that identity)?
- How do our individual identities determine our collective identity, and how does this affect our OD?
- What is currently the core motivating philosophy in the Program, and what has PDTG done to motivate people that militant philosophy is a good thing?”

4.3.2. Recent changes in residence

To begin day two of the workshop, Juan Carlos and I wished to continue exploring the connections between identity and change that we had begun exploring with the change spiders, and do so by using creative methodologies that evoke emotions and intuitions beyond rational thinking. In this exercise, we asked participants to draw a picture comparing the transition process from last two places she or he had lived. Specifically, we asked to see a) *What was the easiest and the most difficult thing to leave behind from your previous place of residence?*, and, b) *What has been the easiest and most difficult thing to accept about your new residence environment?* We shared the results first in small groups (2–3 people) and then in an overall plenary. I now share some of the stories that emerged, and how these influenced an interesting shift in conversation.

Selected stories that emerge in the plenary discussion

The exercise stimulated multiple senses and emotions as people found themselves reflecting on sights, sounds, and smells associated with previous residences. Simona, for example, becomes nostalgic for her home in Guatemala City: “*On the table there is a stack of fresh tortillas, and I was telling you yesterday how much I miss them (laughter). I grew up with tortillas and on the corner by my house, towards the plaza..., every day I would walk by and smell the tortillas and hear the sound of the tortillas being made...*” (Simona). She has a hard time drawing her new city Lima—of which she is not a huge fan with its infamous grey skies—because she has not yet formed a detailed image of what Lima represents for her. Similarly, José expresses “*tremendous joy and happiness*” in reflecting upon the beautiful historic home he left in Amsterdam (see figure 15), as compared to his current apartment in Lima that requires 100 keys for security!

Figure 15—José's recent moves



Gradually, people begin sharing more detailed stories about *who they were* in their previous residences or who they are becoming in current residences. For example, Marco remembers living in a shared apartment near a squatter's camp in Holland where he and his roommates were robbed eight times, including one time in which the thieves stole his camera and he decided to wait to report it to his insurance until the next inevitable robbery, which then never came (laughter)! In spite of the insecurity, he felt more peace and tranquility there than he does now living in Lima in more safe quarters. That said, after living in seven different neighborhoods in Lima, Marco feels a new sense of belonging in Magdalena del Mar. His neighbors say hello to him, and a traditional market still forms part of day-to-day life in the community, *"although they must see me as part of the barrio folklore; they must say to themselves 'there goes that crazy gringo with his baby.'"* In his new home, he visualizes his daughter's smile on the balcony in the afternoons as they look for birds, *"who are our main friends"* (laughter) *"This is an image of tenderness to me"* (Marco).

Patricio shares that in the last few months he has tried to bring closure to past conflictual moments he has had in his life, but when he tried drawing his recent move from Uruguay, he realized that the experience was still very open and painful for him, and therefore, difficult to express in drawing. He had left Perú (and his job at PDTG) to pursue a girl, but he felt lost in Montevideo, even as he now misses the tranquility of that city, as well as its folkloric culture. He shares a difficult episode:

“One time we had a really heated discussion and I left running from the house because my head was super-hot, and when I started to walk I realized that I knew absolutely no one in that city and that no one was available to listen to what was happening to me—something that wouldn’t happen in Lima; I would have friends and family which I could go to. I remember sharing this feeling via Skype with a friend who was living in Spain at the time and he says: ‘Buddy, at least you could get home walking if you had to!’ In that moment that really lifted my spirits and I decided I had to return home. But I shared with Katy how irresponsible that decision was, which I paid for immediately because I had three and a half days on buses and trains thinking about what I could have done differently for things to have worked out better. I could have done many things, but my irresponsibility and immaturity made me run away really fast, leaving me with the sensation of needing to return to bring closure to something.”

This situation leads Patricio to reflect on the other half of his drawing, his home barrio of “Villa Maria del Triunfo”, a place where people do not necessarily have a university education, but *“they work their asses off every day as carpenters or in construction. There I normally get faster and more accessible answers to life’s daily challenges, which is why I often return there.”* He shares that one of the things that brings people together in his barrio is sports and he draws three places where he was able to play with other kids, including a park with no trees, but with a clearly marked path that served as a bike path. He remembers when one of his friends got a bike and how *“all twenty of us”* were able to have a turn around the path on his new bike. He later adds: *“So that cultural life of the barrio, feeling safe there and finding the precise answers to your problems is something I’m always going to miss and have a hard time leaving behind. Regardless of where I am I’m always going to go back there. I can’t live anywhere for more than 6-7 months and I will always feel the necessity to return to my barrio.”*

Ana shares a story of living in a poor barrio with her first husband in his grandparent’s house and feeling like she had stopped being herself. *“I felt lost and didn’t recognize myself; I was absorbed in a dynamic that wasn’t my own and I feel disgusted with that.”* Then, instead of developing that experience further, she instead shares her experience of living in San Juan de Lurigancho as a child, where she was only able to live for two years *“as a family”* with her mom and her mom’s side of the family. The land they lived on had been acquired by land invasion and it was an area affected by Shining Path and MRTA violence. Since her family was

places, even though I have lived in 5 places since then. Perhaps there is something not yet closed there”(Ana).

The conversation shifts (without facilitator prompting) from challenges in adapting to major moves to discussions on how individuals attempt to fit in within PDTG

The transition to this line of reflection begins with an anecdote shared by me (Alfredo) warning of the potential risks of using that which we know from the past as the main standard from which to judge the present (indirectly referring to Patricio’s “ideal barrio” story). When he was 21, he lived for a year as a student abroad in Spain, and for the first 5 months he compared everything he saw in Spain to his upbringing in Northern New Mexico—concluding that many things were simply inferior versions of what he knew in New Mexico. Only in the second half of his stay was he able to distinguish Spain as its own thing, and as a result, really enjoy its culture. Marco adds that we think we learn so much being in a place for a couple of weeks or even a month, but he now realizes that after being in Perú for five years, he is barely starting to understand some things better. He thinks we need to find ways to appreciate new places and situations independently of ourselves, which is difficult. This would help him navigate the complex contradictions he sees within social movements, including many things he disagrees with, such as authoritarian strongman leaders and lack of participation of women. However, in spite of these realities, he values social movement critique of the development model and the social movement concept of “the people’s mandate”. He asks himself, *“How do you create a practice in which you don’t try to judge or categorize others, but gather the things that can be useful to you and the process you are pursuing?”* (Marco).

Mine (Alfredo) and Marco’s comments lead to a series of reflections on the benefits and challenges of living with or close to one’s own family or in-laws, including Ricardo building on Ana’s previous comments on the lost autonomy she felt in the home of her in-laws (and he on the lost autonomy he felt when relatives moved into his mother’s house). Ana later asks why it is that up until now we have not examined more deeply these intercultural issues in PDTG. *“It makes a difference having been born socialized in another country and culture, particularly with our European friends... Yet we all want to see each other as equals with the same ideology, culture, personal motivations and work roles; yet we’re not the same! So, how can we generate a shared identity without ignoring our differences? And how can we process these differences as strengths and not a weakness that divides us or creates the need for self-marginalization or unhealthy power relationships?”* (Ana).

Ricardo offers Edwin's (who recently left PDTG in conflict) clear political differences with Marco as an example of the differences Ana is referring to and adds that these issues have never been dealt with collectively. He (Ricardo) also has political differences, but he knows that an endemic practice of "the left" is to highlight differences and eventually splinter itself. *"So I decided I needed to highlight my points in common as a starting point for working here"*, which reminds him of how PDTG's emerging support of social movements and Zapatismo did not appeal to Betty, who was a self-declared strong socialist (and who also left in the last year). Ricardo continues: *"This is why I have questioned the idea of militancy here at PDTG, because militancy means having political affinities and a political agreement/platform (like a political party). But we don't talk about it in the open and this has always worried me. I think in Edwin's case he left the Program because of these political differences, although I could be wrong. I think we need to speak more openly about these political differences"* (Ricardo).

Marco declares that he feels we (the participants) are now getting important themes on the table and should ensure to register them on cards. He echoes the idea that *"we pretend to be equals"*, but that in practice, we have different talents and should consider these in a complementary way. Moreover, he agrees that we need to discuss different visions and political positions, but most importantly, find practices that allow them (PDTG) to deal with the differences in a healthy way. Ana agrees but warns against the trap of "assumed" consensus, in which conflict is eliminated, polarization is avoided, and the preferred strategy is to start from points in common (which was Ricardo's declared strategy earlier). Consensus is more comfortable than saying: *"these are our differences so let's work on them. So we work on what's collective and lose ourselves as people in the collective, we lose our history and our ways of thinking...."* She concludes by admitting to differences she has had with Edwin and Roberta, but also notes that she has differences with Marco who is her husband. She feels the important thing is to make these differences explicit and work with them.

4.3.3. Analysis

Complex "militant" identity emerges as people enable and constrain each other in reflective conversation

Recording important bits of personal history in a creative spider drawing understandably stirred up emotions as people reflected back on food, names and nicknames, clothing styles, and other important categories of meaning from their past. The "change" focus of the spider exercise drew

attention to the strong effects of social conditioning on personal identity in different social settings. To speak about change over time is to ask questions about how and why we as people change, including how social conditioning affects us. Significant changes in the way we dress, for example, become very obvious even though they occurred in a much more subtle way over time. For some participants, new awareness of this social conditioning generated alarm and the use of deterministic language to explain the reasons they change. The idea of social pressure to conform to norms led to reflections on perceived negative effects of PDTG militant culture, led by Ricardo and Mariana.

According to Ricardo and Mariana, militant culture is a meaningful characteristic assumed to be held by "PDTG". Although they both work for PDTG, they are referring to PDTG as a tangible object that exists outside of themselves, and which holds dominant beliefs on militancy, which they do not hold. This reification of PDTG is an example of what Mead called a social object (Mead 1938, in Stacey 2007, p. 310). Markets, governments, sports teams, and organizations are all examples of patterned interactions in human experience that we as people come to reify as if they were tangibly real, i.e., "as if" they were physical objects. However, social objects only exist in human experience via social interaction (i.e., as part of social acts), unlike physical objects that exist in nature (Stacey, 2007: 310). Once reified, people may then adopt behaviors and language that reinforce their understanding of the organization as a social object—i.e., they continually make it real. As such, social objects can be thought of as *generalized tendencies, common to large numbers of people who believe in the tangible existence of the object, to act in similar ways in similar situations* (Stacey 2007, p. 313). These generalized tendencies can be seen in repetitive, habitual patterns of action and can be further reinforced by norms, procedures and value statements (Stacey 2007, p. 313).

People not only reify patterns of interaction (e.g. such as organizations) as social objects; by attributing overriding motives or values, they also idealize

them, give them personality, or what Mead referred to as *cult values* (Mead, 1923). Cult values can be good or bad or both, depending on how different people interpret them, operationalize them, or are affected by them. For example, the cult value “leave no man behind” of the U.S. Marine Corps may tend to generate solidarity and even heroic action, while the cult value “the sanctity of human life” may lead to a range of positive and negative behaviors, including the murder of doctors who perform abortions. Cult values in organizations, when they support the unity of experience or idealization of the whole, can generate a powerful experience of “we” identity to their members (Stacey, 2007: 433).

In the PDTG example above, *militancy* can be thought of as a cult value that personalizes the social object PDTG, and can therefore generate feelings of inclusion or exclusion, conformity, or inconformity as people interpret the meaning of militancy and put their interpretations into action.

Figure 17—Image 1 from PDTG offices emanating militancy



Ricardo takes issue with the way militancy is being operationalized as visible individualist behavior rather than as a collective political project. He is not dismissing the cult value militancy per se, but his understanding of its implementation in PDTG, including how it affects him—e.g., as scattered, individualist “militants” leave him hanging on important work tasks. Mariana, and then Simona, enable Ricardo’s arguments, with Mariana highlighting her belief that militancy requires charismatic and dictatorial leadership, which she has not yet seen in PDTG, and Simona confirming her personal experience with individualism in PDTG (“individualism”, which could be another cult value). In the conversation, ideas are being validated and challenged—i.e., enabled and constrained; each intervention affects the

overall pattern of communication which begins to take shape around the cult value “militancy.”

Just as Mariana, Simona and Ricardo enable each other’s ideas in different ways; Patricio, Juan-Carlos and I challenge some of these ideas, or attempt to take them in new directions. For example, Juan-Carlos and I challenge Mariana’s implicit “Theory X” and dictatorial assumptions. Later in the

Figure 18—Image 2 from PDTG offices emanating militancy



conversation, Patricio encourages the group challenging PDTG’s militancy to not throw “the baby out with the bathwater” because he feels many positive elements exist in the original “ethic” of the Program. According to Patricio, identity is constructed, and although the present group is influenced by the legacy of previous members of PDTG, and their assumptions on militancy, what is really needed is to *“generate a dialogue that doesn’t polarize these experiences but gathers their contributions to generate a renovated identity”* (Patricio). Then John constrains further by reminding Patricio that old habits are hard to break. Mariana—apparently aware of the constraining responses to her earlier outspoken interventions challenging the coherence of PDTGs militancy—states that she needs to be less impulsive when she speaks, but Patricio responds that it was not bad at all.

Stacey notes that when cult values are applied directly to action, without allowing for variations contingent on a specific situation, a risk exists that those undertaking such action actually form a cult in which they exclude all who do not comply (Stacey 2007, p. 342). In real life, abstract cult values must be interpreted, and put into practice (or resisted) in ways that make sense to each person. However, this view can lead to conflict because the

idealized cult value is always less than ideal in practice, or is interpreted by some in ways outside the dominant interpretation. The meaning of militancy in PDTG is clearly still being constructed and is actively being contested by some. But Patricio tries to find a middle ground between old and new by implying that PDTG identity is still open for definition, even as some criteria from the original organizational “ethic” are worth keeping and building upon.

During the end of day reflection period, we (all participants) discovered that Ricardo had been emboldened by Mariana’s statements and audacity earlier in the day: *“Mariana was really rough in her intervention, and that motivated me to also awaken some issues. It was a really good conversation and difficult things started to come out, and I wished Ana and Marco had been here to hear (they are now present, and Mariana is not). She’s new but I liked the things she had to say. I think this moment in the Program is like a hinge; the issues are coming out in the cards and I think this was an ideal moment to do this workshop”* (Ricardo). Patricio, on the other hand, notes that Mariana’s strong interventions helped him realize that from the time he returned to PDTG until today, he had been reluctant to integrate himself fully as a member of the organization. *“But when I realized that perhaps some of the issues she brought up were due to a lack of knowledge of the history of the Program (and why things came to be the way they are), ... I realized I had something to say about that and that made me feel good—that I could play a role at some level of historical transmission”* (Patricio). In both cases, Mariana’s emotional gesturing awoke internal conversations in Ricardo and Patricio and different response strategies, each strategy affecting the pattern of conversation that emerged (and in Patricio’s case, affected his explicit intentions for future action).

Creative exercises help generate a “fun” workshop culture that is contrasted with PDTG’s work culture. This leads to conversation shifts in which new members reveal their own sensemaking with regards to their place in the Program

Still during the day 1 end of day reflection period Katy, prompted by a comment by Ricardo regarding the fun nature of the day’s exercises, adds another salvo to the argument that PDTG has a stressful work culture, by sharing her own recent experience integrating into PDTG: *“I think this is also a moment to be able to laugh openly. In the time I’ve been with the Program people have been pretty over-tasked with their work and I’ve asked myself ‘does anyone have fun here? Are people motivated because they feel good or just committed to doing the work? How much do people really want to be here?’... Now that I see you feeling a bit more free, laughing, enjoying the activities, I start to realize that the Program [I know] is very structured, very formal, and here it’s like an informal space; it’s like we start to get to know each other and allow ourselves to be known, which is sometimes difficult in a formal space”*. However, she then notes that each exercise (the spider in this case) presents a decision on how much one should say: *“How much do I really want to establish confidence with the group, and how much do I protect?... How vulnerable will I let myself be in this space?”* (Katy).

The following day we (all participants) learned that this reticence was deeply engrained, and in Simona, as well as Katy. In the reflection period following the “Change in Residence” exercise, Marco noticed that newer members of PDTG had stopped participating in the discussion as soon as the conversation had shifted to organizational matters. In response, Simona reveals her impression that whereas yesterday (day 1) the conversation was focused on the emerging “PDTG of today,” the “PDTG of yesterday” is more prominent in today’s discussions. In fact, in yesterday’s discussions, she, José, and Katy had privately discussed how none of them had really been integrated into PDTG. She retrieves her rich picture drawing from the day before (her interpretation of PDTGs problematic situation—see **Figure**

19), revealing one foot in and one foot out in the picture: *"Because I don't feel like I'm part of the process. And it's not necessarily about sharing an ideology or work style or not—simply there is a lack of knowledge about what I'm trying to contribute."* (Simona).

Figure 19—Simona with one foot in, one foot out

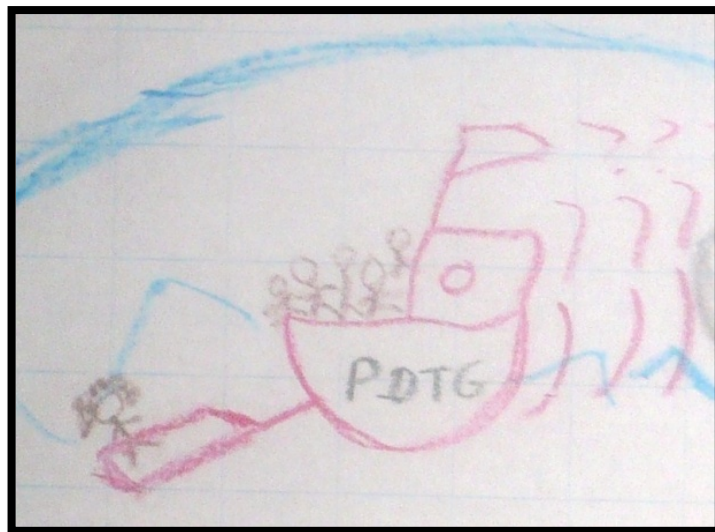


Katy then highlights one of the cards she had written during the same rich picture exercise asking *"what is PDTG, who is PDTG, what are they looking for?"* and notes that these things are still not clear to her. She also shares her rich picture from the day before (see **Figure 20**), which reveals a big PDTG boat hauling a little dingy that she is on. *"From there I can see the people on the boat; but to what extent am I going to get on the boat?...; to what extent am I going to belong to something that I don't know? But here come my fears—I'd rather hear about a past full of learning and shared efforts than a past full of internal conflict"* (Katy).

Katy, who has been with PDTG for less than a month, and Simona, who has been there less than three, are openly revealing their own sensemaking, while clarifying that they do not feel part of PDTG, and, in Katy's case, her fear that the "militant conflicts" of the past represent a stuck pattern of

behavior that may be incapable of learning and changing. The idealized cult value militancy is inevitably less than ideal in practice, which generates tension and fear as Katy tries to understand whether she even wants to fit in or not. However, Simona's reticence goes beyond militancy, to incorporate her feeling of being out of place simply because not enough effort has been made to help her figure out her place. The symbolic nature of her drawing resonates with Katy, who has drawn the same "feeling" as Simona, in a different form. This visual communication of feelings and the discussions that follow have "raised the stakes" on the importance of digging deeper into the sources of ongoing feelings of inclusion and exclusion being expressed within the group.

Figure 20—Katy watches the PDTG boat from the dingy



Like the "personal spider" exercise, the "change in residence" exercise also evolved into deep reflections on the cult value militancy, but also dealt with broader identity issues. For example, building on my (Alfredo) juxtaposition of his different mindsets on how he approached his two semesters abroad in Spain, Marco noted the importance of suspending judgment and allowing our understandings of similarities and differences, in addition to likes and dislikes, to form over longer periods of time. This idea led him to reflections on the need to figure out how to deal with paradoxical issues, such as the complex contradictions within social movements, which on the one hand,

offer important development alternatives, but on the other, reproduce population-wide patterns of behavior that favor charismatic strongman leaders and restrict women's participation. Ana tied these cultural issues to the fact that within PDTG, people are not the same—just as Peruvians and Europeans are not the same—and openly asked why they have not spoken of these issues before. This topic led to broader questions on how to live with differences for mutual benefit and how to generate shared identity without ignoring differences.

Ricardo then directly tied past and current conflicts to the cult value militancy, and attributed Edwin's departure to political differences with Marco, and Betty's departure, to her not sharing a "social movement-centric" understanding of militancy. He then revealed his own strategy for fitting in, in which he focuses on points in common to get along (along with "punching the clock" shared earlier). Again, following Mead, Stacey notes that the ways in which people try to elevate values to cult status in daily interaction can be problematic and lead to actions that marginalize those who do not share these values, and can eventually become formal or informal norms and evaluative criteria by which people's belonging (inclusion or exclusion) is judged (Stacey 2007: 342). Indeed, at the end of the reflection Ana affirmed some of Ricardo's questioning of the concept of militancy within PDTG and began to call out some of these criteria:

"We've even had a sort of homogenization of the profile of the ideal militant here, and based on that standard of good and bad we've judged people. Good if we all work 14 hours a day because PDTG is a militant organization; bad if someone doesn't show up to work on time or even worse if they don't show up to a protest. We have a lot of things to rethink: How do we create a more democratic collective? What do we want of our militancy? If it's not a political collective, it's also not a political party; but it is a political something trying to transform society and us within it. How can we do this? With what criteria and practices? With what ways of understanding reality?"
(Ana)

Militancy is clearly emerging as a dominant theme, or population-wide pattern, in the communicative interaction of the workshop thus far. In PDTG, I infer that the conflict being referred to in this workshop (and

confirmed by interviews) was not generally creative or explorative, but destructive. Ricardo revealed how he chooses not to introduce alternative ideas regarding militancy in his day-to-day work situation. Yet, in the workshop, Ricardo does introduce diversity in ideas on militancy and thereby generates explorative conflict that, were he to share outside of this space, might result in degenerative conflict of the kind that contributed to the departure of five staff members over the last year. In CRP theory, explorative conflict (provoked by diversity) is needed to generate the possibility for the transformation of stuck patterns of communication (Stacey 2007: 259). New ideas can support creative conflict amongst closely connected interacting people, and as these actors enable and constrain each other, new patterns of communicative interaction can emerge. This is analogous to the way spontaneous change emerges “at the edge of chaos” in complexity theory. Interestingly, this situation opens up the possibility that a greater chance exists of some meaningful transformation in patterns of communication on militancy in workshops spaces with similar conditions to this one, than in PDTG’s other work spaces.

In different ways, methods provoke themes that provide natural “bridges” between personal and organizational issues

The “personal spider” exercise was intended by the facilitators to help the entire group get to know each other better, but when Juan-Carlos and I later reflected upon what actually emerged in that exercise, we became curious to try to push the personal identity and change themes further in day 2 (thus leading to the change in residences exercise). We did not *intend* either exercise to be about PDTG’s problems with their militant identity, but in retrospect, some linkages do appear to exist between the exercises and the types of themes that emerged. A conversation on changes of residence is essentially a conversation on how individuals manage culture shock. Changes in residence make us aware of difference, of how we do or do not seem to fit in, in “La Rica Vicky,” or in the streets of Montevideo, or in an apartment in Lima with 100 keys. Each person shared stories that reflected

how they bring elements of their history and identity into new places, how they seek out more of these elements in their new spaces, and how they adopt strategies to either change their new location, or at least survive, when an ideal fit does not exist. Sharing these stories opens up the theme of cultural adjustment, and eventually, the conversation emerges into discussion on individual entry into PDTG and the quality of relationships between individuals and the overall militant culture of the Program. It is not a big leap to make from a discussion on personal integration experiences in the midst of culture shock, to a discussion on individual adaptation to PDTG. Both themes reveal how an inability to recognize differences when people cross cultural boundaries can be a major source of conflict.

The personal “change” focus of both exercises introduced the dynamic of broader social conditioning and resistances to that conditioning, eventually leading to discussions on the challenges of adaptation to PDTG. Again, it is not a big leap to make from discussing personal changes over time (e.g., such as in the way we as people dress), to discussing how we are influenced to change by broader conditioning factors. Subsequently, a plausible thematic connection occurs between an increased awareness of these conditioning factors (e.g. how fear, passions, curiosity, and multiple other factors influence change, and generate social pressure to not be too different from the norm) and Ricardo’s introduction of implicit pressures to conform to a brand of militancy in PDTG. Both exercises provided natural bridges between individual and organizational identity and issues. The following elements are worth considering on how these bridges and the conversations themselves might have emerged, including any methodological relationships:

- The methods did not *cause* these reflections, nor did the facilitators intend for *these themes in particular* to emerge. These are ongoing questions and conversations that already exist in different people’s minds, in hallway conversations, or conversations over coffee in informal spaces, and more openly in different forms in PDTG’s day-to-day life.

These conversations have continued, and have perhaps been dealt with differently in this workshop, but did not start here.

- Enough frustration or deviance is already present in the participants that they are ready to speak—the moment is “ideal” for some for this workshop (as noted by Ricardo). External facilitators or organizational managers had no role in generating this ideal moment, which was clearly also affected by the sensitive emotional situation generated by people leaving their jobs and the recent history of people leaving and entering the organization. Additionally, the lack of presence of organizational leaders in the spider exercise and most of day one certainly emboldened participants to say things more freely, or at least differently (e.g., more emotionally or vehemently) than they might have in their presence. All these factors contributed to the enabling workshop environment of the first day.
- The exercises perhaps generated conversation themes that made the separation between personal life and organizational life more blurry. The themes are similar, perhaps naturalizing the transfer of conversation on those themes to the organizational sphere.
- Emotional gesturing provokes internal conversations and reveals different response strategies. This emotional gesturing clearly affects the quality of communication and helps situate the cult value militancy as the main overall pattern of conversation in the first workshop.
- In spite of the tension from recent conflicts, people seem to want to be heard—to share personal stories as part of their sense-making process with PDTG¹⁵. In long periods of reflection, people detail their experiences in ways that reveal further complexity.

I conclude this section by noting that individual identity was an important source of *diversity* that affected the patterns of conversation in these two exercises. Both exercises started with and validated individual history and identity, even as they revealed how these identities are subject to social

¹⁵ For example, in the change in residence exercise, when we asked the participants to share “top level” reflections in plenary after they had already shared their full drawings in smaller groups, each person autonomously decided to “retell” their entire drawing to the whole group.

conditioning. I revisit a reflection from the “personal spider” exercise to make the point: *“In professional spaces in particular, social conditioning can be so strong that we end up revealing very limited—i.e., distilled or purified, mature, non-emotional, superficial—versions of our selves, when in reality we are actually complex and interesting people”*. In these exercises, participants went well beyond the “professional selves” and introduced elements of their identities related to what they like to read, eat, or be called, how they dress or look, who they like to hang out with, and how all of these have changed over time. In the “change in residence” exercise, participants revealed complex sense-making strategies that exposed much more about who they were than about the actual places to which or from which they were moving. Both exercises drew on people’s rational, intuitive, emotional, and other selves, in some cases, evoking sights and smells that become a basis from which to interpret new experiences. These different elements acted as multiple doorways into participant identity, which greatly expanded the diversity of “selves” represented in the workshop. This introduction of diversity—within people’s identity—clearly affected the overall patterns of conversation that emerged.

Methodologically, then, an initial connection exists between multiple ways of knowing and how and what complexity is revealed. That is, exercises that creatively evoke thinking and feeling, as well as personal and collective identity, can open multiple doorways to deep reflection in which people enable and constrain ideas to develop a complex picture of how they are interpreting and experiencing organizational challenges. This occurs, even as people always play their hand in ways that do not reveal all their motivations, or complex identities. I continue to explore this theme throughout the dissertation.

As a final note, the influence of these reflective sessions was clear in the AR purpose statement presented in section 3.5.1.:

“Develop a shared organizational identity via the identification, recognition and valuing of individual and collective capacities and

challenges. The process should recognize diversity (and differences) and value and build on complementarities in order to support coherence between external social change pursuits and internal personal and organizational change”.

That statement was constructed from the “challenge categories” and questions shown in the table below. The table is an abridged version of the questions and categories that were generated and organized by PDTG participants in WS 1, facilitated by Juan Carlos and me. The ideas in the table were gathered throughout WS 1, usually at the end of each exercise on index cards or post-it notes.

Challenge categories	Selected challenges and questions
Relationships between individuals and the collective	Key challenging factors included personal problems, lack of professionalism, excessive individualism at the expense of the collective and resistance to change. Some key questions included: <i>“Why are we unable to clear up misunderstandings”</i> ; <i>“How can we work collectively without losing our individuality”</i> ; and, <i>“How do we learn in PDTG?”</i>
Work culture	The focus here was on how the Program’s “overly activist” culture affected their ability generate a healthy work environment, again, balancing individual with collective needs.
The conditioning effect of the external context on PDTG	This category highlighted many contradictions between organizational discourse and practice, including problematic internal power relations. Questions were posed inquiring the extent to which negative societal patterns of behavior—interiorized by PDTG members and reenacted in their own behaviors—affected their ability to achieve coherence between their theories and practices of change.
Identity	The identity category was mostly made up of key questions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>What and who is PDTG, what are they looking for? What is PDTG’s current identity?</i> – <i>Where are we going as an organization and how far have we come in achieving our goals?</i> – <i>How can we construct an identity based on dialogue and not polarization?</i> – <i>What is our shared commitment that brings us together in this current moment in time?</i> – <i>How can we transmit important historical information about PDTG?</i> – <i>How much shared identity is healthy, and what are the limits between personal and professional life?</i>

4.4. A debate on organizational relevance enables and constrains participation and meaning in important ways

4.4.1. Overview

Juan Carlos and I approached the second workshop with the underlying assumption that any identity strengthening work would need to be based on more strategic clarity of PDTG's purpose. In other words, "the strategic beacon" needed to be made clearer first and foremost, in order to generate a shared basis of identity with subsequent exercises. Methodologically, our intent was to identify deep assumptions on change, and ultimately to develop a shared "organizational" theory of change based on critical examination of individual theories of change. To do so, we carried out approximately one and a half day of workshop activities over two long half days. The main methodological moments were as follows:

- 1) "The forest", team sensemaking exercise (d1)
- 2) "The debate" on organizational relevance (d1)
- 3) Individual theory of change drawings (d1)
- 4) "The blanket" reflective exercise (d2)
- 5) Mind maps "reading" our current moment (d2)
- 6) Personal send-off letters and next steps (d2)

I now share additional examples from workshop 2 of how reflexive methodology helped surface complexity with PDTG in interesting ways. Specifically, I explore how key elements of individual and organizational identity emerge through a debate on organizational relevance. In the debate, problems related to how individualistic behaviors affect "the collective" continued to surface (continued from WS1 the week before), including accusatory arguments on whether PDTG is just another NGO, and not a militant collective. Additionally, arguments surfaced for the first time regarding the relevance of PDTG's programmatic offering in support of social movements. Methodologically I explore how:

- The competitive nature of this debate generates communication that oversimplifies issues and polarizes the debate, while at the same time, generating nuanced responses that "put the complexity back in". In the process, key issues are "inventoried" and critically analyzed.
- Role playing "ritual" allows for less inhibited conversation about difficult issues, including sensitive worldviews on militancy, commitment and class orientation. The style of the debate, however, generates participant exclusion, and in some cases, exaggerates enabling-

constraints¹⁶. Ideas and areas of focus continue to be shaped through the enabling-constraints of communicative processes.

- Reflection on the debate and on a separate individual theory of change exercise supported a shift from *strategic reflection* to *personal motivation* as the basis for strengthening organizational identity in the AR process.

In the remainder of this section (4.4) I focus on moment 2, “The debate”, but I also lightly explore Moment 5, “Mind maps “reading” our current moment”.

4.4.2. Methodology

Given that we had emerged from workshop 1 with a mandate to look at organizational identity, we (Juan-Carlos and I in consultation with Marco) felt that a debate starting from two opposite, dichotomizing positions could be effective in exposing significant assumptions on the nature of PDTG’s work, relevance and identity. “The debate” would be part of a broader block of activity called, “*How does social change occur?*,” which would end in an individual and organizational theory of change exercises. The debate itself consisted of two teams of approximately four people each taking opposite positions on PDTG relevance. Team A (Ana, Juan-Carlos, and Patricio) was to argue, “*We (PDTG) are contributing significantly to social change*”, and team B (Marco, Ricardo, Katy, and José), the opposite argument. The exercise included a preparatory exercise to develop arguments, the debate itself, and a long reflection session post-debate. John and I (Alfredo) and moderated the debate, with minimal rules and facilitation. I now share parts of the debate and subsequently offer analysis.

4.4.3. Selected exchanges from the debates

Juan-Carlos began the debate on behalf of Team A, arguing that although many organizations produce knowledge, they often do so without any social change intention; and in the process they reinforce existing academic power structures. PDTG, on the other hand, intends to “*democratize knowledges in content and form and with a social change agenda*”. Team B charges back that democratizing knowledge generation requires a radical agenda, which is impossible when an organization is completely funded by the development industry (they cite an example of censoring José’s recent Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) publication). Furthermore, PDTG’s best-known publications are published, but not written, by PDTG and even these publications do not actually benefit actors in social movements. Team A

¹⁶ As a reminder from Chapter 2, “enabling-constraints” are communicational power relations that enable some ideas and actions and constrain others, thus affecting how change or movement into the future occurs.

counters that PDTG may be conditioned, but not controlled by their funders, and cite significant support from many radical allies (e.g., popular kitchens, cultural activists, feminists, etc.) as evidence of their own alternative agenda. Patricio challenges Team B's tone and cynicism and adds that life is not black and white and that they (as PDTG) wish to transform, not destroy the enemy.

The same phenomenon replayed itself later when Team A defended itself against Team B's accusation that their theory of change misses an important actor in the state (i.e., government), without which social change is impossible: *"Social organization and mobilization are only part of a theory of change that must eventually advocate and take positions in the state to be able to change the structural schemes of domination in Perú. Without this it is just a pretty discourse about structural change or about achieving new social relations, while we have a state that imposes dominant relationships in our society!"* Team A responds that they do indeed recognize the state, but that this is not the primary battle. In fact, one of their biggest achievements is that they have existed for four years promoting plurality in discourses to expand beyond the notion of a state to be captured (as the main condition for social change). Other key actors are also important, which is why they care so much about the power of dialogue between people with different voices, including different social movements, academic intellectuals, the state, and others. *It is this outlook and attitude that distinguishes them.*

Later in the debate, a particularly sharp exchange occurred when Ricardo (Team B) suggested that PDTG was perhaps closer to being an NGO than a militant organization. In the back and forth that followed, deep criticisms emerged on how "militancy" has generated problematic internal power relations in PDTG (as was revealed in WS1). The exchange began after Ana (Team A), responding to an earlier challenge, noted that PDTG *is* indeed a militant collective, but with members who do not do their part. Ricardo (Team B) responds: *"Many of us here know what that [militancy] means and have traumatic experiences with it"* (referring to those who have left in power disputes, most recently Edwin and Roberta). *A militant collective has to do with militant commitments, basic agreements, basic areas of consensus. In these two and a half years I openly criticize this and think we should not use that adjective when we refer to our organization"* (this is the identical point he made in the change in residences exercise, but now much more emphatically). Ricardo's team member Marco agrees with him, noting that many moments have occurred in which a small minority within PDTG has committed itself to work on important tasks on weekends, for example, without support from others. The lack of participation makes for a lonely experience, which is not at all like a militant collective. He adds

that the work accomplished is often of substandard professional quality. *“We express our dreams with a very clear and convincing tone, but we’re lacking commitment and capacity. Because if we receive all this money and don’t deliver we should really question whether we are contributing to social change”*. Upping the ante, Ricardo explains that without the funding they receive, they would not even be doing the work, which in essence means that they are consultants who offer services to organizations that work in social movements, including “cultural consulting”.

Patricio, Ana and Juan-Carlos react in kind, with three high-volume responses:

- *“How hard is it to stop seeing in black and white? Ask yourselves why you are still here? It’s not true nothing has changed. Are you going to tell me you’re here because the salary is good? There is much more commitment than that. There is affinity that links us; it’s there. Do you know what consulting is—have you ever consulted?”* (Patricio)
- *“That the president of a national federation arrives at your office looking for you and asks ‘Compañera Ana, how can we generate an event so that the indigenous women’s, the feminists and Afro-Peruvian movements will come together?’ Is that a consultancy? Or are we winning over an important space [as a legitimate actor]?”* (Ana)
- *“I come from the world of consultancies which is where you respond uncritically to an offer. If Yanachoca [mining company] asks us for a consultancy tomorrow are we going to do it? No, but a consultant wishing to maximize income would”*. (Juan-Carlos)

After further exchanges, Team A lowers the volume and reasons that what makes this team different is the creation of bridges between diverse ways of knowing and doing, incorporating politics, art, culture, education, indigenous, and women’s movements.

After the debate concluded, Juan Carlos and I facilitated a plenary session during which significant internal tensions were revealed on issues of team commitment, militancy, and internal power relations. Ricardo insists that unspoken standards of militancy (as Ana had laid out in WS 1) needed to be clarified to be able to resolve these internal issues. In addition, he is quick to note that although the debate generated exaggeration, the themes that emerged were all real—to which José agrees: *“To what extent was it theatre and to what extent was it real life? The arguments started having validity because they were grounded in real examples”* (José). This leads to reflection by Ana on different indicators of “good” militancy, by clarifying that participating in protest marches and meetings does not make you a militant unless you follow through by contributing to the *real* work that comes afterwards. She adds that when she asks for

support from the “compañeras” (from the women in the women’s organizations PDTG works with), for example, they either help or promise to help next time, and then they actually follow through. On the other hand, *“in our group there have been innumerable times in which no one responds to requests for support—and then not even a sorry. We talk about solidarity but there is none; this affects our practice of militancy, regardless of our concept”*. She then offers a class-based hypothesis of why this is so:

“Our class, cultural and academic background are privileges that mark us; they affect the relation that we can have with people who have a condition of being more oppressed than us. But within us there are also conditions of oppression that also cause disequilibrium, although they’re not that perceptible. Because the director is still a European male; because along with me, his partner, we lead the organization. And we can ask ourselves why did Roberta and Edwin leave in relation to this? I think that there are various questions that would give us ideas about power relationships, as well as help us to construct militancy and good relationships between us. And I know there are many differences on how people see these things.

I have a lot of affinity with squatters, indigenous people and other people in need. I feel different in this group (PDTG), because I have experienced significant oppression as well. I know what it’s like to not have enough to eat (begins to cry)... and I know what it’s like when the women say ‘let’s organize something’; women who have left their homes, their gardens, and are not able to eat to be able to create this Federation that is for everyone, including me, and I know that’s how it is. And I’m willing to go to Puno (on Bolivia’s border) to organize an event with them. But with me, who else? There’s the difference....” (Ana)

Patricio then offers some additional reflections that both enable and challenge some of Ana’s comments. He first asks, *“to what extent do we become more committed to work with those with whom we feel more affinity? Is it easier to form bonds of commitment with these people?”* He then explains how he personally does identify more strongly with some groups (rural youth leaders for example) than others (research institutes with which he has had a negative past experience). However, for some reason, he also has a strong affinity with foreigners, such as Marco, José, Sander, and others—perhaps because they are not prejudiced by his background and so are more accepting. In addition, he agrees with Ana that “we” need to identify our prejudices and areas in common to be able to construct our militancy on that edifice. Moreover, he argues that this includes reflection on the extent to which family upbringing shapes emotions, feelings, and knowledge in the workplace, because these things also affect “our” militancy.

4.4.4. Analysis

The competitive nature of the debate generates communication that oversimplifies issues and polarizes the debate, while at the same time generating nuanced responses that “put the complexity back in”

Juan-Carlos and I had a strong feeling that this debate would generate meaningful information for use later in the process. Additionally, we felt it would provide a good way for me to learn more about PDTG’s focus and approaches, which he was only beginning to learn about. However, neither of us anticipated that it would “take off” so quickly and assume a life of its own. The debate addressed many angles of the relationships between internal organizational practices and external social change intentions (e.g., the relevance of PDTG publications, degree of capture by the development industry, adequacy of their theory of change, etc.). The very fact that one team had to defend the position *“we are contributing significantly to social change”* meant that team members had to make visible their strong assumptions about the value of PDTG’s offerings to the actors and causes with which they work. However, we (Juan Carlos and me) found that many of the attacks on the other team’s positions were done so with polarizing, black and white statements that oversimplified matters rather than drawing out complexity.

For example, the accusation of PDTG conducting “cultural consulting” rather than radical transformational work seemed intended to polarize the debate and vanquish the opponent (as noted by Patricio). At that level, the debate was contributing to communicational patterns that were not effectively taking complexity into account. However, being a debate, the other team was obliged to defend its positions, and in the process, teams generated nuanced reflections that deconstructed the simplified arguments, and in so doing, “put the complexity back in”. For example, in response to attacks on the relevance of PDTG publications, Team A developed a thoughtful response that broadened the definition of knowledge production (i.e., beyond publications), highlighted its understanding of social movements as

part of a transformational theory of change (and not as generic actors to be strengthened), and emphasized the high level of commitment implicit in the risks it takes to work with COCACAMI (adding that this work puts PDTG under the government's watch constantly). Later in the debate, the team used the example of its school of leadership with CONACAMI (in response to another attack) as further evidence that, to this team, the purpose of knowledge production is to help people respond to their real-life challenges.

Role playing "ritual" allows for less inhibited conversation about difficult issues, in some cases, exaggerating enabling-constraints

In the example above, Ricardo expressed real pent-up frustration on how he perceives people to have suffered due to organizational militancy, but he does so with a persona much more vociferous and direct than is his normal demeanor (indeed, in a later reflection period, he indirectly apologizes for his tone). Moreover, Marco, PDTG's director in real life, uses the cover of his debate team's position to challenge people's commitment, which occurs after Ricardo opens the door on criticizing militancy. In response to Ricardo's attack on the use of the term "militancy", Marco ostensibly supports Ricardo's argument but is actually making a different point: the problem is not a lack of well-thought-out militancy (Ricardo's point), but uncommitted militants and low quality work. This is perhaps a tough message to deliver to the assembled staff, which can easily see through the debate to the underlying messages. Perhaps not coincidentally, all three reactions by Team A are to Ricardo's "cultural consulting" line of argument and not to Marco's challenge. In these exchanges, it appears that Ricardo and Marco feel "safe" to say things they could or would not say in so straightforward a manner outside of a role-playing exercise. The following excerpt from the post-debate plenary illustrates this:

"We were able to say things that we wouldn't have been able to say in an everyday personal relationship. These are things that one thinks; at one moment or another we think these things regardless of how convinced we might be about the overall value of Program. But these things remain unspoken and festering, but during the debate out they came. The good thing is, obviously, it's not that I believe all the things I said in the debate, but I assumed that role in that moment believing in what I was representing; but it's a game in

which I personally don't necessarily believe everything I say in that role; that's what is interesting." (Ricardo)

Greenberg and Eskew (1993: 224) note that participants in role playing types of exercises are aware that they are not "playing for keeps", and so do not necessarily represent their natural selves. Also, Snowden (2009) notes that when participants have resilient personalities and are unlikely to easily bear a grudge, much learning can occur from participants on both sides of a ritualistic process. Ricardo's direct confrontation of the divisive power of the cult value militancy, and then his subsequent "cultural consulting" line, have him "aggressively playing the game" he is engaged in; as is Marco. According to Greenberg and Eskew (1993: 225), whether or not there is correspondence between what people say and actually mean in role play, much can be learned about the way social rules are perceived by paying attention to *what people say they would do*. In this case, considering the conversation in question continued to attract around the overall dominant theme of the cult value militancy, it is likely that their comments had some significant elements of reality to them, which they felt uninhibited to say under the cover of the ritualistic debate. Indeed, Ricardo found it important to constrain any thinking that might dismiss the themes that had emerged, as having been due to the exaggeration of the debate behavior.

Complexity simultaneously arises in local interaction and in population-wide patterns of behavior

In the post-debate reflection session, we saw how Ana explicitly confronted the insinuations about how power relations have figured heavily in people leaving PDTG, while also connecting her interpretation of the problems related to militancy (e.g., "real" work, follow-through after protests) to cultural upbringing and social class. This was in reaction to Ricardo and José's (now no longer in debate role) reflective comments affirming the content of the debate was real. Her intervention generated a tense atmosphere to what was already a generally "on edge" mood (as I perceived it), generated by the debate itself. Patricio's careful reflections reduced the tension by validating Ana's argument regarding class affinity—

i.e., he too feels some affinity with those who have a similar economic background to him (which both he and Ana had also revealed in the “change in residence” exercise in WS1). Then, he also shows how origin does not have to determine all affinities, as he shares how he is drawn to friendly Europeans.

Drawing on Mead (1934) and Elias (2000), Stacey (2007: 305) explains how people’s local communication is a social process that reflects their accumulated history of social interaction, including cultural experiences, societal expectations, and even their rational understandings of broader population-wide patterns. Stated another way, people’s experience “out there” in the world informs and conditions (but does not determine) the things we communicate and the forms in which we do so—for example in an organization. This straightforward theory of social conditioning is not inconsistent with core elements of other non-deterministic social conditioning theories, such as Bourdieu’s habitus (Bourdieu, 1998), Giddens’ structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), and Vickers’ appreciative settings (Checkland, 2000) (explained in more detail in **section 5.2.3**).

However, Stacey draws on Mead in particular to show how people’s accumulated experiences with the population-wide patterns that have evolved over time are present in all current actions as generalizations and idealizations, which are continually “taken up” by people in their local interactions. In the debate exercise (including plenary reflections), “external” population-wide patterns are being taken up both in content and form. In content (i.e., thematically), participants have introduced patterns of beliefs with real-life examples about hegemonic practices from the development industry, the role of “the state” versus the role of social movements in transforming society, and the view that knowledge should be democratized in content and form of production. “The state” and “the development industry” are social objects that are being taken up locally as generalizations based on experiences with and beliefs about the actors who participate in those patterns of interaction. “Militancy”, “class solidarity” and

“the democratization of knowledge” are more akin to cult values (i.e., as idealized attributes) that are also being taken up in these local interactions. Population-wide patterns of interaction (i.e., behaviors, rather than themes) in broader society are also being taken up in the debate. Juan-Carlos notes that: *“Both teams took on the style of the argumentative tournaments of the political left, and even though we knew it was an exercise, some of us even made it theatrical”* (Juan-Carlos). Moreover, Patricio adds that this is a well-known “destructive technique” for winning debates.

Thus, local communicative interaction is being formed (or conditioned) by broader population-wide patterns while at the same time contributing to the self-organization of those population-wide patterns: ‘Pattern is emerging locally and globally at the same time, all in local communication in which the interplay of intentions means making particular to a particular situation that which is general and idealized’ (Stacey, 2007: 305). However, the ways broader population-wide patterns—expressed as generalized or idealized tendencies to act—are “taken up” and made local varies from person to person, as each person must interpret potential intentions in the specific situations encountered. As people make the general particular to a specific time and situation, the different ways they do so ‘will inevitably lead to conflict in that we will differ from each other on just how to make the generalization particular in each present time period and situation’ (Stacey 2007: 307). This phenomenon appears to be occurring in PDTG concerning the meaning of the cult value militancy. Based on what he has said, militancy to Ricardo means having formal *“militant commitments, basic agreements and areas of consensus”*. This formal view of militancy is related in concept to a “political party” understanding of militancy; that is, true militants organize and express themselves through formal political parties. Ana’s view on the other hand, is based (in part) on people’s levels of commitment and effort, and is influenced by socioeconomic class. Other views exist as well, as people keep exploring what the differences are and negotiating the meaning of the generalization militancy in PDTG.

According to Stacey (2007: 307), 'it is this conflictual, explorative process or particularization that makes possible the further evolution of the generalization as tiny variations in the particular way the generalization is taken up are amplified across a population over time'. In PDTG, as different participants contest the way things are currently being done, the possibility of PDTGs transformation as a social object 'arises in this particularization because of the potential for spontaneity to generate variety in human action, and the capacity of nonlinear interaction to amplify consequent small differences in their particularization' (Stacey 2007: 307). In other words, to the extent that the particularization of the cult value militancy is explorative, overall PDTG identity on this issue can be transformed.

The meaning of militancy will not be transformed during the first two workshops by any means, but the very focus of PDTG's strengthening process will be, as described in the following section.

The use of debate generates participant exclusion, and a major shift in the patterns of communication in the workshop and PDTG's overall strengthening focus

During the end of day reflection period, Marco shared that he had personally enjoyed the exercises, but was worried that the debate and theory of change (not shared here) exercises might have alienated Katy and José, both of whom had been with PDTG for less than a month and who lacked knowledge of PDTG discourse and areas of focus. He speculated that perhaps the debates in particular came easier to those who have been engaging in this sort of practice for years (and who enjoy political debates!), but both the debate style and lack of organizational knowledge likely hindered Katy and Jose's participation. José quickly affirms that for him this was indeed the case and that since he was unaware of actual PDTG history, he thought that people getting heated in the debate was part of a role-playing game. When he realized that real issues and feelings existed behind the aggression, he felt a bit uncomfortable. Katy shared José's feelings on this, adding: *"At first everything was nice and polite but later on*

it swerved in a different direction; the... arguments were much stronger and there were even open disputes about who did said this or did what, and it went on and on. I asked myself, how much does defending a position help the overall group?" Her confusion on the meaning behind the black and white position taking led her to reflect openly on her own ability to fit in to the organization: "I was asking myself whether I could fit into the rhythm of this group, because I come from a different background with other discourses and codes... I don't have a militant cause, nor do I like to talk about politics, so how much can I really contribute to this group, no? Also, I question myself; I bet they must be thinking: 'What is Katy doing here if she doesn't talk our talk?'"

These doubts were present in Katy's boat/dingy drawing in WS 1, but were now being expressed as open anxiety about whether she fits in or not. She admits to not having a militant cause, which is generating feelings of exclusion as she does not share the "we" identity of the other participants, all of whom do appear to consider themselves to be militants (even as the particular meaning is contested). Significantly, Katy had been recently brought on in an intentional effort to hire personnel based on skill sets, rather than militant credentials, due to major frustration by Marco regarding the lack of quality and commitment by "good militants" who were unfortunately "bad workers" (interview with Marco). A short month later, Katy is feeling like an outsider, in part because she is the only PDTG participant not openly militant (I was also less militant than the others, which I explore in **Chapter 8**).

Up to this point in the two workshops, the dominant pattern of conversation had been focused on contested meanings of "militancy for social change" and the conflicts that have emanated from this contestation, including the flight of five people from PDTG. Katy's open expression of isolation—which emerged unexpectedly after three days of participation in two workshops—now generated a spontaneous shift in the overall workshop pattern of communication, as a wave of participants attempted to enable her feeling of

belonging. Juan-Carlos was the first to respond to Katy's expression of outsider status by noting (in a lighthearted manner) that when he first started working with PDTG, he, who has experience with political discourse, also felt alienated because the intellectual bent at PDTG was very strong—e.g., *they* threw intellectuals' names around that he had never heard of: *"Foucault esto y Foucault el otro"* (Juan-Carlos). He reaffirms to Katy that, in his perception, this is a new moment in PDTG in which her valuable *process* knowledge (i.e., facilitation, design—knowing *"how"*) is being more and more valued alongside *content* knowledge (i.e., propositions about *what is?*). Marco agreed and noted that the vitriol was at an even higher volume a year ago when new people entered, and that things were definitely improving. Patricio later shared a similar anecdote of his own challenges integrating into PDTG, in which he felt people saw him more as a big-hearted, fun loving soccer-playing kid, and not a legitimate militant: *"And I asked myself: 'Hey if I'm in a political space why don't they see me as someone who can also contribute at that level?' That helped me make my decision [to leave the country on my desired journey to Uruguay]. I don't know if it was wrong or right, but what I do know is that my reasoning in that workshop moment was not right: to consider difference as bad, as not fitting in. I remember Nicola (the facilitator) had told me that perhaps my differences made me much more important because I break their monotony. But I didn't want to hear it and I said 'I don't feel good here, no one understands me', and I used that as part of my reasoning to leave"* (Patricio). However, he also shares another anecdote in which feeling marginalized in another organization only made him redouble his efforts to be part of the organization and prove them wrong.

Marco then emphasized that one of PDTG's greatest lessons so far is that a balance is necessary between different ways of thinking. Perhaps Katy's less-developed militant identity can be just as much of an advantage as a disadvantage, particularly because of her strong facilitation skills with women: *"We can learn a lot from you"* (Marco). Ana adds the PDTG needs to be careful not to hegemonize languages and ideas because differences

may enrich their work. She suggests to Katy that she engage and challenge people more when they say things like “State-centric”, by asking for clarifications or by pushing people to provide examples so that PDTG won’t be so self-referential and use empty terms. Over the next moments, several people continue offering anecdotes and indirect reflections related to Katy’s feeling of isolation. The various anecdotes and messages describe a possible world in which diversity in worldviews does not inevitably end in conflict—a PDTG in which people can contribute in a committed manner without adopting a hegemonic understanding and practice of militancy. These enabling reactions weigh against much of the content that has emerged in the workshop up until this point—content that tells a more conflictual story. However, they confirm earlier expressions of a desire to change and do things differently.

Later in the evening during a post-workshop evaluation session, Marco shared with the facilitators that he is glad people addressed some of Katy’s worries and that we will need to continue to do so. However, at the same time, it will be important to encourage her to develop her militancy, *“because these things are important for PDTG as well. But that needs to be constructed over time”* (Marco). He also shared that he feels the debate had been very effective in inventorying issues and generating critical conversations on those themes. For example, he feels this would have been a useful tool to have used to weigh pros and cons of supporting Daniel Ortega’s possible visit to a PDTG sponsored event earlier in the year. Nevertheless, he also highlighted how he feels the debate in particular generated unnecessary exaggerations, which, beyond real problems with militancy, generated exclusion methodologically. It is clearer to him now that PDTG’s strengthening process needs to focus more effort on integrating new members Katy, José, and Simona into the group. I shared a similar takeaway: that I felt there were many demands present in the group, including the need to strengthen organizational identity, integrate new people into the team, and generate common language, and also deal with remaining sensitive issues from Edwin and Roberta’s departure. Clearly, in

this moment, people's energies were focused on internal identity and integration/team-construction; not necessarily in reference to improved strategic thinking—the current focus of the process.

Instead of pushing forward with the current agenda, we (Juan Carlos, Alfredo, Marco and John) decided to spend the following day organizing and reflecting upon what we had produced so far in the two workshops so that it would be useful for any future decision on action-research focus. To do so, we conducted exercises that focused on people's motivations for belonging to PDTG, asking¹⁷: a) what each person wants from and brings to PDTG, b) what questions she or he has of PDTG, and c) how each person would like the action-research process to contribute to any of this. The responses were documented on mind-maps and revealed that participants "offer" different skills, motivations, and interests, including helpful attitudes and personality traits. For example, Ricardo brings hard technical skills around editing publications, audiovisual development, and formal communications; whereas Katy emphasizes project management, and Ana, higher level coordination skills. With regards to attitudes and personality traits, Patricio brings a good mood that irradiates to others—but the same goes for his bad moods! Participants also offered *access* to different groups and organizations (indigenous, youth artists, LGBT, solidarity movement and donor NGOs) *and bridges between worlds*, such as process/content knowledge, local governance/state-led governance, academia/NGOs, and several others.

But the maps also revealed how each complex individual belongs to various worlds, including but not limited to the transient world PDTG. Some people saw PDTG as part of their own developmental strategy and judge it to the extent it fulfills that end. For example, Ricardo would like to participate in more events and connect to the indigenous movements on the ground. This request follows a complaint he lodged under the cover of debate earlier, accusing organizational leaders of ignoring his desire to participate in the

¹⁷ This is in reference to methodological moment 5 "Mind maps "reading" our current moment (d2)"

social forum in Brazil earlier in the year. He feels he has been somewhat pigeonholed in his publications role and would even like to attend a workshop being given this coming Saturday on project design. Marco, Patricio, and Ricardo wish PDTG to serve as a vehicle for furthering their research interests, with Marco wishing to eventually publish a book based on his own research, via PDTG. Lastly, most participants emphasized their desire to learn more about militant activism and social movements, including me, who shared that I, like Katy, am just beginning purposely to explore my own militancy.

In contrast to the debate, the end of workshop mind maps (and an additional related exercise—"Personal send-off letters") allowed for a "safe" questioning of each person's actual and desired relationship with PDTG. The mind-map questions generated conversations in each person's own mind and validated the desirability of having individual expectations that do not necessarily start from collective expectations. A return to an individual focus seemed to be a good way to generate balance after the polemic debate the previous day. The second workshop ended on a positive note with several participants expressing that the day two shift (to team integration rather than strategic focus) had indeed been a good read of collective energies in the group. Several actions were identified for follow up, including specific new workshops to address issues that had emerged around integration of personnel and power relationships.

4.5. Chapter conclusion

The debate surfaced significant complexity and helped identify key internal issues, power relationships, and organizational conversations, some of which were previously unspoken. The debate put externally focused challenges on the table for the first time, particularly in relation to the value and relevance of PDTG's publications and knowledge production, its focus on social movements versus other actors, such as the state, and the very nature of PDTG's identity as a militant organization versus an NGO. However, the ritualistic role playing included histrionic inflections, biting sarcasm, premeditated exaggeration, prosecutorial questioning, and

entertaining humor as part of an ongoing emotional exchange. This constrained participation of some members, even to the point of generating alienation, while at the same time revealing deep fears about what kinds of militancy are valid in the organization.

In both workshops, sensitive worldviews on militancy, commitment, and class orientation emerged in intense moments of debate and reflection. Emotional exchanges were effective in inventorying key challenges, but they also opened up subjects and behaviors not so easily placed back in the bag. Guhathakurta, reflecting on her work with participatory theater experiences in Bangladesh, notes that theater enhances the expression of different emotions and even catharsis, in a way in which it also gives a kind of protection to participants to express those emotions in a safe manner: 'For theatre is after all a representation, not reality' (Guhathakurta, 2008: 521). However, José's earlier point challenges this notion: *"To what extent was it theatre and to what extent was it real life?"* (José). As José noted, the debate arguments were grounded in real examples, and thus gained validity. In retrospect, the debate was a risky method to use in the situation in which it was used, leading me to question the extent to which the emotions expressed were done so in a safe manner after all. I revisit this point in some detail in **Chapter 8**.

I conclude the present chapter with the following key points:

- Workshops 1 and 2 themselves became emergent patterned interactions of people engaging in enabling and constraining communication. This pattern of interaction, including outside facilitator participation, self-organized in the sense that it took on directions that no one actor intended, eventually leading to a change in identity of PDTG's organizational strengthening process.
- The intentional use of multiple ways of knowing led to shifts in the patterns of communicative interaction in the two workshops. It did so by opening up diverse elements of individual identity (in the case of the spider and change in residence exercises), and emotional, exaggerated

exchanges that embodied militant behavior and discourse (the debate exercise), and “using” these elements in creative and disruptive ways.

- Diversity—revealed through multiple ways of knowing—may have provided an instigator, but reflection periods allowed the workshop to take on new patterns as people’s reflective sensemaking revealed rich layers of complexity that simply had not yet emerged earlier on in the exercises. In other words, reflection as a methodology was a key enabler of self-organizing communicative interaction that was then capable of shifting/emerging into new patterns.
- Whereas diversity in ideas, leading to explorative conflict, is an important condition for spontaneous shifts of patterns of communication to occur, no one can control or predict the new patterns that emerge, nor even that a new pattern will emerge. However, when shifts in patterns of conversation do occur, they do so via processes of power relating that enable and constrain participant thoughts and actions, which may produce dynamics of inclusion and exclusion (Stacey, 2007: 433-4). Changes in overall patterns of communication are radically unpredictable, so the risks involved with methodically “tinkering” with these patterns is high, and should consider the anxiety that participation generates.
- Regarding methodological causality, external facilitators, in consultation with Marco, offered methods based on their best read of the situation in different moments, which yielded different results. Although facilitators held much power regarding what the group would be asked to do next, we did not control the responses called forth in different participants (Stacey, 2007: 323), each of which gestured back according to what made sense to her or him. Meaning emerged not in what was said, intended or facilitated, but in the back and forth gesturing processes that followed. As such, meaning cannot exist in methodological intentionality (a one-way causal linkage cannot occur), but in the emergent relationship between method (facilitators) and participants. We cannot really know what we mean or intend—methodologically speaking—until

we engage with real life complexity and “it” gestures back to us, provoking further responses, and so on.

In this chapter, I have primarily sought to establish initial relationships between: a) methodology and the emergence of complex responsive processes of human relating, and b) expressions of multiple ways of knowing that generate diversity capable of shifting patterns of ongoing, complex relating. The present chapter also revealed that PDTG is clearly struggling to balance diversity and coherence—i.e., to manage tensions and contradictions, and to benefit from diversity and positive energy without losing coherence and focus (Baser and Morgan, 2008). In the following chapter, I begin making more explicit connections between methodology, complexity, and capacity development.

5. Capacity emerges as shifts in patterns of communicative interaction—Sirua case

Chapter formatting key

Voice	Formatting
Alfredo as narrator of empirical data	Text in regular Times New Roman font
Alfredo as interpreter and analyst	Verdana font and either under a sub-heading called “analysis” or in a single-cell table.
Participant voices	“Double quotation marks and italics” When included in my analysis, they are also in Verdana font.

5.1. Introduction and chapter focus

In this chapter, I share examples from the Sirua action-research process to show how learning, as a form of capacity development, occurs in complex responsive processes of human relating. Just as with PDTG, complexity emerged via communicative interaction in different moments of the Sirua process (as will be evident in the examples). However, the focus of the chapter is different, as I wish to highlight how *capacity* emerges in the complex human processes of communicative relating. Drawing on soft systems thinking, organizational learning, and complex responsive processes theory, I analyze:

- How *soft* systemic methodology in the Sirua case helped participants paint a composite picture of Corridor history, current challenges, visions and conditions for positive change, which ultimately affected Sirua’s strategic intentions

Figure 21—Awacachi Corridor welcome sign



- How the “simple” use of different perspectives as a source of diversity in communicative interaction affected the patterns of communication that emerged in the reflective spaces of the Sirua process
- How the use of “methodological redundancy” helped develop “composite” sketches of Sirua’s organizational complexity

Worth noting here, in Chapter 6, I then share an additional example from the PDTG process, by analyzing:

- How the use of an advanced form of Soft Systems Methodology (SSM Mode 2—see **section 2.2.3**) brings enabling-constraints into deeper contrast than that which might emerge in “everyday” communicative interaction

In presenting examples from both cases, I am able to highlight three important methodological approaches that emerged in my research, and show how each affected learning in unique ways. In the process, I connect capacity-building methodology to learning within complex responsive processes theory. Without a theory of learning, I argue that we as capacity-building facilitators have no basis on which to claim that capacity development may occur. Before sharing the two examples (in **sections 5.3.-5.4.**), I discuss core elements of the learning theories behind complex responsive processes and Soft Systems Thinking, thereby demonstrating how the two are distinct but compatible.

5.2. Soft systems thinking, complex responsive processes and organizational learning

5.2.1. Why learning for capacity-building?

Three main reasons exist as to why learning theory and learning approaches are needed when thinking about capacity-building in complex environments—1) complexity itself—i.e., the complex nature of social change, 2) capacity *development* intentionality, and 3) the communicational aspects of learning in complex environments. I present the first two in this section, and then present the third in **section 5.2.2.**

The complex nature of social change requires iterative learning approaches to support change

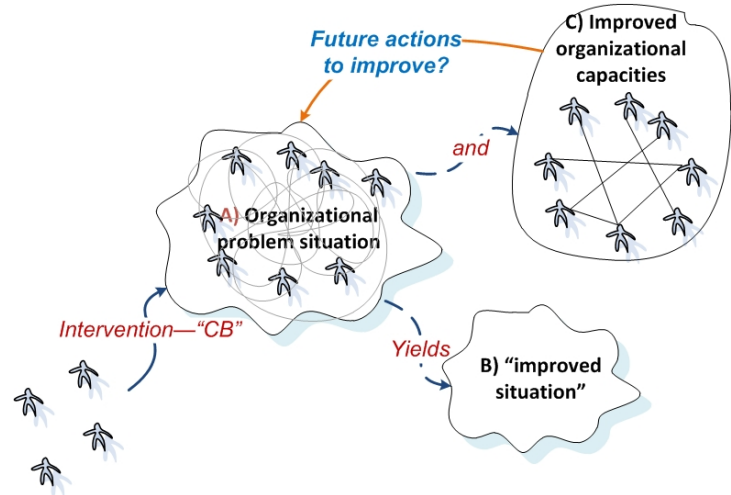
The most common word in capacity development literature used to explain the basic concept of capacity is the synonym “ability”. Capacity development is about an increase in *abilities* that allows individuals and broader social groupings, such as organizations, ‘to be able to do something with some sort of intention and with some sort of effectiveness and at some sort of scale over time’ (Morgan, 2006b: 7). At a minimum, capacity-building interventions should generate abilities at the level of increased awareness and knowledge. This is not a terribly high standard to bear, and indeed, capacity-building aspires to contribute to outcomes beyond these basic outputs—perhaps even to support transformations that change behavior in important ways. However, as mentioned in the literature review, to think about capacity-building as a form of methodological intervention that *causes* change at an organizational level, which then reverberates to cause social change, is precarious in complex environments (Ortiz Aragón, 2010b). Developmental change in people, families, communities, and wider societal configurations is inherently complex, uncertain and unpredictable, rendering inadequate more conventional approaches to development—particularly project-focused approaches based on questionable linear, cause-effect models of change—even as implementers seem to use them for everything (Britton, 2005: 9). Causal notions of how interventions influence substantive change are even more problematic in the short term as development has a pace of its own, and the extent to which it can be speeded up through the application of increased resources and developmental interventions is limited (Kaplan 1999: 10), and not necessarily attributable to specific capacity-building processes or approaches (James 2001: 8). In complex environments, flexible, adaptable, learning-based approaches are necessary to help ‘increase people’s ability to understand the intended and unintended consequences of their actions, and to adapt and change the way they work in the light of their colleagues’ and other organizations’ experience’ (Britton, 2005: 9). In this sense, organizational learning processes are essential for enabling capacity development interveners to respond to the new and often unpredictable challenges that face them in complex environments (Britton 2005: 9). (Note: This is essentially the same logic that underpins the SSM learning assumptions presented in **section 2.3.3**).

The intention to not only solve problems but strengthen capacities

Facilitators of capacity-building processes intervene in challenging situations, and frequently carry out trainings, multi-purpose workshops, meetings, and many other activities. Although these activities may in some cases be helpful in responding to different organizational challenges or opportunities, this is not in and of itself sufficient to cast them as capacity-building interventions (Baser and Morgan, 2008: 52). A relatively simple difference in

intervention intentionality separates organizational capacity-building from other organizational change interventions; a concept that I have expressed in **Figure 22**.

Figure 22—Basic capacity building intervention assumption



The idea is that any intervention by capacity builders (internal or external) into an organizational problematic situation (A) should yield both an improved situation (B) and improved organizational capacities for addressing problematic situations (C). In other words, capacity *development* is a core purpose of capacity-building (as noted earlier). This is not a minor difference because including increased capacity as a core intention necessarily changes the nature of the assignment from one of problem solving to one of problem solving *and learning*. However, whereas the complex nature of social change highlights the importance of learning as an important *capacity-building process*—i.e., learning as a way of intervening—the capacity *development* mandate highlights the importance of *learning itself as capacity*. Learning becomes an important starting point for an overall theory of change on how capacity strengthening supports social change, or other relevant programmatic purposes, in complex environments.

5.2.2. *Organizational learning and complex responsive processes*

In CRP theory, as people interact locally through communicative processes (via symbols and gestures), broader (i.e., population-wide) patterns of behavior emerge that no one actor intended or caused. At any given moment, an organization “is” the dominant themes that emerge as population-wide pattern of interaction between people who communicate and act on themes that affect organizational purposes—inside and outside the organization. These dominant themes may attract (i.e., self-organize) around routines, habits, planned initiatives (including projects) or some other generalization or idealization, such as a social object or cult value, which has to be made operational (e.g., adopted, modified, resisted etc.) in local interaction (Stacey, 2007: 259). This operationalization may generate clarity, excitement, and synergy, just as it may generate confusion, fear, and resistance. These feelings and ideas generated are made operational either in communicative interaction *between* people or in personal dialogue or emotional gesturing *within* the embodied minds of individuals—i.e., in talk, nonverbal gesturing

or action, or in “feeling states” (Griffin et al., 1999: 304). Change in the dominant patterns of “organizational” communication may spontaneously occur when diversity exists in human interaction that generates explorative conflict and deviance as sources of transformation, in a dynamic state “at the edge of chaos” (Stacey, 2007: 259). This explorative conflict is initiated as diverse actors act upon (via communicative processes) their feelings and thoughts of clarity, excitement, confusion, fear, and many other thoughts and feelings, thereby generating resistance (i.e., constraining) or synergy (i.e., enabling)—either of which (or in tandem) can emerge into new thematic patterns of organizational conversation and focus. In CRP, organizational *learning is simply change in these themes*, as knowledge is language (i.e., complex gesturing) and meaning emerges as themes interact to form new conversations (Stacey, 2007: 445). New knowledge is changes in patterns of communicative relationships (Griffin et al., 1999: 303)—i.e., changes in the dominant themes groupings of people talk about and act on.

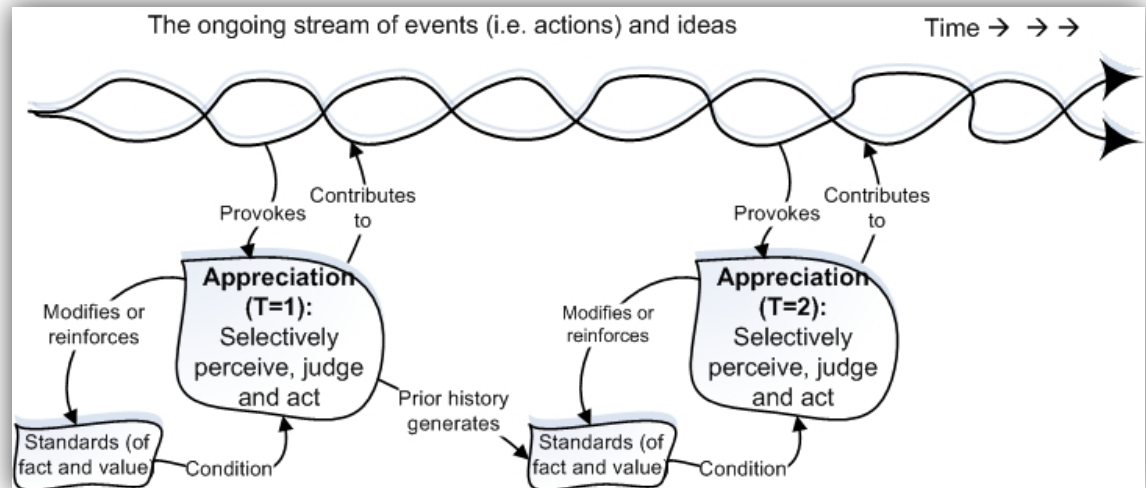
Learning then, emerges through self-organization as people interact locally and interpret, enable and constrain the meanings of the dominant organizing themes of communication. Learning emerges in interactive social processes and depends on the complex mix of local interaction that occurs over time. Consequently, emergent learning possibilities are necessarily different in organizations that display *relating dynamics* of stability, regularity, and predictability, versus those that display dynamics of randomness, utter chaos, and tremendous instability, or those that display paradoxical characteristics of “bounded instability”, or edge of chaos. This is because when dynamics are stable or stuck, a network of interaction simply repeats its past—its own internal dynamics make it incapable of evolving novel responses (Griffin et al., 1999: 302). Similarly, ongoing operation in an unstable, chaotic dynamic might eventually lead to disintegration and extinction. At the “edge of chaos”, however, “bounded” high energy presents an enabling condition for spontaneous change in patterns of communication. All of these different states—from static and stuck, to energetic yet fluid, to chaotic—themselves depend on ‘how responsive agents are in relation to each other, how richly connected they are to each other, [and] how diverse they are in relation to each other’ (Griffin et al. 1999: 302).

5.2.3. *Soft systems thinking and appreciative systems theory (AST)*

Checkland developed the learning assumptions behind SSM in conjunction with Vickers’ theory of appreciative systems. Appreciative systems theory (AST) starts from the idea that life is an ongoing flux (or stream) of events, actions and ideas, all which interweave as life emerges forward and time passes. Vickers expressed this idea as a two stranded rope (events and ideas, with action implicit in both)—the strands being inseparable and continuously affecting each

other (see **Figure 23**). In CRP thinking, this double strand would include the intentions, ideas, actions, and events of all people in a given social setting.

Figure 23—Appreciative system representation (adapted from Checkland, 2000: S52)



Appreciation is occasioned by people’s ability to select and choose from all that is occurring around and inside us. Appreciation means that when faced with situations, conversations, tasks, or simply mundane everyday realities, we *selectively* perceive some of that reality, make judgments, generate new ideas, and take action—not necessarily in that order, nor separately for that matter. All these actions—i.e., from perceiving to intervening in the ongoing stream of events and ideas—contribute to that stream. Thus, a recursive loop occurs in which the stream of events and ideas generates appreciation (i.e., selective filtering), while our actions contribute to the very stream we are appreciating. Our new appreciation of reality in any given moment contains the history of our previous appreciation, and will inform how we selectively perceive in the future.

Vickers’ appreciation means selective perception of reality (i.e., *what is?*) and value judgments about reality (i.e., *what does that mean?*). Our understanding of what reality is and what that means are both informed by tacit or explicit rules and standards of real or unreal, good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable, valid or invalid. However, the very act of using these standards as we interact in the ongoing flux of events and ideas may itself modify them. Over time, as we appreciate life’s realities, we learn and develop a view of how to act to attain, maintain, change, or elude certain relationships. According to Checkland, Vickers’ greatest insight was that no ultimate *external* source exists to identify which standards are deemed good or bad, important or unimportant, relevant or irrelevant. Rather, the source of the standards ‘is the previous history of

the system itself” (Checkland, 2000: S51). This is consistent with the CRP understanding that people’s accumulated experiences with the population-wide patterns that have evolved over time are present in all current actions as generalizations and idealizations that are continually taken up by people in their local interactions.

Although it can be used to look at how an individual (i.e., a single human appreciative “system”) selectively perceives the world, appreciative systems theory is more focused on purposeful human *interaction* than on individual behavior. In this sense, it is again compatible with CRP because meaningful relationships emerge via internal and external communicative gesturing, thus rendering the contents of the appreciative system (i.e., its appreciative *settings*) the dynamic, conditioned patterns of communication between gesturing people. As such, as people interact locally via complex responsive processes of human relating through symbols and gestures, the population-wide patterns that emerge as dominant themes in communicative interaction can be thought of as appreciative settings. Learning entails changes in appreciative settings—i.e., changes in dominant themes of communicative interaction, including the standards of good and bad that condition that interaction.

5.2.4. Summary—starting points for “*appreciating*” learning in capacity development

The learning theories of both Complex Responsive Processes and Soft Systems Thinking are compatible and enrich each other in important ways. For the remainder of this dissertation, I consider learning to have occurred or be occurring when:

- New thematic patterns of organizational communication emerge, thereby generating new meaning. This could include significant shifts in organizational communication, or a deepening of existing communication.
- New knowledge from a particular perspective, or knowledge that was previously unavailable to the dominant webs of relating in an organization, informs others who are engaging in communication, enriching or building on the knowledge already present in communication.
- Specific worldviews emerge in communication and are used to enrich dialogue and generate better questions about real life situations, pertinent to that worldview or in reaction to it. This may include the surfacing and altering of standards and beliefs (values) of what is real, and what is humanly good or bad.
- Meaningful past action (i.e., the history of the appreciative system) is called forth as a source of knowledge that generates discussion with present realities.

- Important relationships, including groupings / configurations of people, emerge or are strengthened to advance a particular type of action that is meaningful to that group. Alternatively, other relationships are avoided or actively constrained.

I now share some examples of how learning emerged as patterns of communication, took form, and evolved as we (primarily Fabricio and me in chapter 5, and Juan Carlos and me in chapter 6) adaptively developed and utilized methods based on “soft” Systemic Theories of Change (STOC) methodological principles (as explained in **section 3.3.2**).

5.3. The methodological use of different perspectives serves as a source of diversity that alters patterns of communicative interaction, generating reflective learning in the process

Checkland’s emphasis on surfacing worldviews emerged from his real life experience in which he noted that different people had different interpretations on what was “the system” to be improved. As such, he found it helpful to model purposeful activity (i.e., design notional “systems” of human activity) based on different worldviews as a source of insight and learning for approaching problematic situations. SST was very present in my initial methodological assumptions (Systemic Theories of Change—STOC) in that I intended to try to separate and use different perspectives to enrich the understanding of problematic situations we might encounter in the action-research. Throughout the Sirua process, Fabricio and I conducted many exercises intended to highlight how different people see the world differently as it relates both to Sirua and the Awacachi Biological Corridor. For example:

- Soliciting drawings of how different actors perceive the Corridor, and then leaving those perspectives as part of a collage of perspectives, rather than trying to join them into a common perspective. Conducting similar exercises regarding how people “see” Sirua by contrasting the Quito office with the San Lorenzo office.
- Conducting analysis of perceived conditions necessary for change, by intentionally separating technical field staff from organizational leaders to elicit differences in perspective more sharply.
- Sharing a “pure” San Lorenzo perspective (based on a field visit to SL) with Quito leadership staff to generate feedback and debate.
- Comparing different ways of understanding change through creative reflective exercises.
- Rating assumptions on an individual basis to capture differences in people’s alignment with different assumptions, and to improve them through comparison and discussion.

- Using SSM to develop, compare, and debate different management systems to develop an overall management system to execute the strategic plan

In all these moments, we (Fabricio and I) did not use the exercises with the intention to model some static understanding of reality as in hard systems thinking. Rather, we used exercises to make comparisons between perspectives to improve analysis to generate better questions to ask of specific situations.

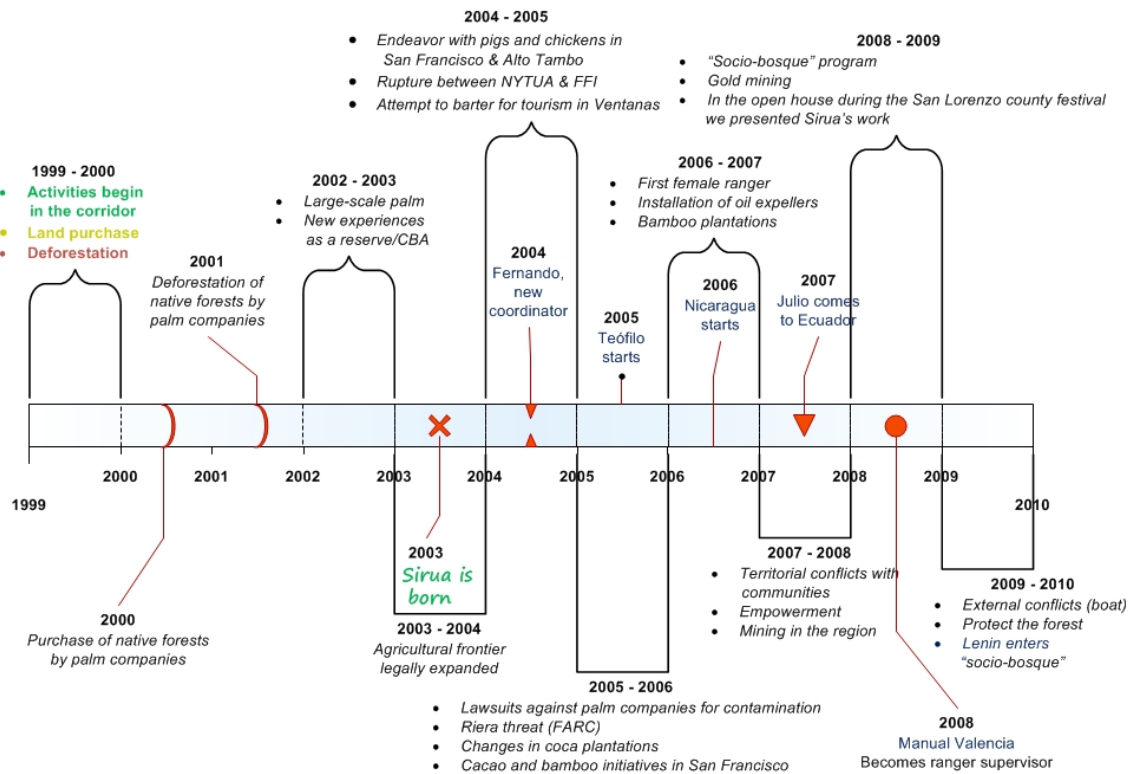
Throughout the first workshop with Sirua, my co-facilitator Fabricio Proaño and I sought to isolate perspectives and avoid premature “consensus” on issues to improve learning from diverse participants. Indeed, the very purpose of this first workshop was to better understand from the perspectives of key stakeholders the strategic themes that affect the Awacachi Biological Corridor, so we thought it would make sense to conduct exercises early on designed to surface perspectives on what the Awacachi Biological Corridor is perceived to be by different actors. Two exercises in particular—a historic timeline exercise and drawings of the Corridor from different perspectives—placed different perspectives on the table and obliged consideration of the relationships between the Corridor and the communities who live in and around the Corridor, amongst other challenges.

5.3.1. Timeline exercise surfaces strong feelings about the role of communities in the Corridor, as well as other key threats

Early in the first workshop, Fabricio and I borrowed the timeline technique from “Future Search” (Weisbord and Janoff, 2000) to interpret the Corridor history as a confluence of personal, global and Corridor-specific events. Each person first registered perceptions individually and then added them to shared timelines posted on the walls. We then divided into groups to interpret the meanings of the timelines.

Manuel Nicaragua from Sirua’s San Lorenzo office presented the Corridor-specific timeline (see **Figure 24**), which documented conflicts with communities in three different places. Although two community members were present, he made the following observation: “*Why communities? Because there are always going to be inconveniences with community members that want to enter our Corridor to cut down wood... Communities use the claim of ancestral rights to look for ways to create problems—so they can say that part of the Corridor is theirs. And that can create conflict*” (M. Nicaragua).

Figure 24—Important moments in the history of the Corridor (One of three timelines developed in the first workshop)



In the subsequent plenary session, Sirua director Fernando Echeverria challenges Nicaragua's focus on community conflict: *"Nicaragua's presentation seemed very accurate and well-focused; the only thing is, maybe it was how he presented that I felt when he mentioned communities; [it was] very strong against the communities. But although we have had conflicts with communities they are actually our friends... We'll always have some conflict because there is little remaining forest; there are pressures and the people want to eat, cut down their little tree, take something. The temptation will always be there, but I don't see it at the level of plan Colombia, for example"* (Fernando). Nicaragua initially agrees and notes that on the timeline, they have used colors to show Plan Colombia as a more difficult conflict than communities. However, he clarifies that although communities are indeed Sirua's allies, it is a question of time before they see the Corridor as more attractive because of their own lack of resources: *"What Fernando says is true; he noted that perhaps I was a bit rough, but I have always considered the communities to be our most important allies. But I also have my fears, my suspicions; because inside the communities there are people who are with us, who see our work in a good light and there are those that generate resistance"* (Nicaragua). He notes that San

Francisco is the community with which Sirua has the fewest problems, but given that they are now essentially out of wood, “*they could invade the Corridor, seek legal support from lawyers, and make a profit at Sirua’s expense*” (Nicaragua). Manuel Valencia—in response to Fernando’s softening of Nicaragua’s strongly-worded intervention about community threats—then supports Nicaragua’s contention about community threats. When the Corridor is all that remains in the area and people in San Francisco need resources to survive, where else will they go but the Corridor? According to Valencia, corrective action must be taken, particularly considering the *increase* in woodcutting by community members, which “*can’t be denied*”. He intervenes with emphatic language, as if to clarify the situation, and highlights various additional challenges:

- The overspill of immigrants from Colombia due to Plan Colombia will inevitably increase land invasions and use of resources because the (nearby) city of San Lorenzo does not have the capacity to absorb so many families.
- Mining is a major threat that is worsening: He notes that the situation is getting worse and teams related to the FARC conflict are coming with men and mining teams. “*So the guerilla’s sponsor miners and give them five or six machines to enter the Corridor (for mining), where inside they already have eight/ten rifles; ten/fifteen machine guns; twenty/thirty pistols. Stupid the ranger that goes in there with a machete and a pair of boots. Simply put, the threats to the Corridor are strong, and worse things are coming.*”
- Alliances with security forces is key: As mining endeavors become more belligerent, maintaining relationships with security forces will be key. He agrees with an earlier statement by Lenin that the few achievements Sirua *has* obtained have resulted from support from the marines and police—i.e., meeting force with force. He asks how three rangers are going to stand up to 40–50 armed miners in the future. “*You go against them and they kill you and keep going*”. Teófilo agrees and later adds that he thinks mining and woodcutting are the two biggest threats.

Community members—speaking up for the first time in the workshop—challenge the severity of “the community threat” put forward by Valencia and Nicaragua, with Orlando from the community of Ventanas noting that, whatever the case, Sirua “*can work better with the support of communities, because without the community’s support they simply don’t have the force*” (Orlando). In addition, Ulpiano, from the community of San Francisco, seconds the emphasis on mining as a threat and shares that he and other community leaders recently convened a meeting to discuss mining problems. Miners are invading upstream land and contaminating the rivers

that flow downstream into San Francisco. Community leaders have requested that the provincial government step in to enforce ancestral rights to the lands on which the miners are located, but have received no response. According to Ulpiano, only the government can remove the miners because “*each miner has two or three hit men bodyguards, so the issues that Valencia speaks of are difficult for us*” (Ulpiano).

Alfredo: Both community members appear to be at a disadvantage in this early moment of the workshop because of the consistent conversation implicating “communities” in the major conflicts that need addressing. Indeed, when Nicaragua first spoke so emphatically about the community threat we, the facilitators, glanced at each other and waited for a reaction, but nothing came at the moment. One of the community members, Ulpiano, is from San Francisco, a community that at the time has no open conflict with Sirua. Orlando is from Ventanas, which is caught up, albeit indirectly, in Sirua conflicts. We continued exploring perspectives on the Corridor and its challenges through a drawing exercise, explained below.

5.3.2. *Perspectives vary on “What is the Corridor?”*

In this exercise, I asked each person to draw the Corridor as he understood it (on a flip chart) and write down on index cards the core messages in the drawings. The exercise revealed both similar and divergent understandings of the Corridor, ranging from the Corridor primarily as a contiguous biological unit, to the Corridor as a source of historical and cultural heritage. For example:

- Both community representatives in their drawings (see **Figures 25 and 26**) and presentations highlight the importance of the rivers that pass through the Corridor, and in particular, their cultural and historical heritage, as well as their relevance to community subsistence and interaction. “*The Cuchilla del Rey (the King’s knife) is historic; it is the pathway from ‘King Baron of Carondelet’ (a town) to Quito. This is why our ancestors gave that area its name. The Durango river empties into the Bogotá and follows the Ibarra-San Lorenzo highway. It is a historic river for our ancestors. Our older community members sold their lands and left the area, so now we are neighbors with Sirua*” (Ulpiano). Orlando also highlights the rivers’ importance in avoiding contamination and maintaining vegetation.

- Teófilo, Valencia and Nicaragua (see **Figures 31 and 32**) also highlight multiple Corridor purposes, but make a clear connection between communities and Corridor as part of the same system, while also noting threats inherent in this relationship:
 - “The Awacachi Corridor is life for communities. [But] I wish people would learn to conserve the forest, and outside settlers would not hunt animals in the Corridor” (Teófilo)
 - “The Corridor serves to protect humans via conservation so they will help us protect the Corridor in return. [But it is] a fragile area because it is in a mining and palm plantation zone with easy access” (Valencia)
 - “There is an interrelation between communities and the Corridor, and respect of the Corridor and its species by the people. But there are threats” (Nicaragua).

Figure 29—Fernando’s view of the Corridor



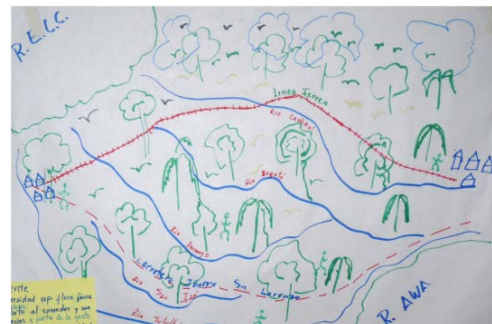
Figure 30—Julio’s view of the Corridor



Figure 31—Teófilo’s view of the Corridor



Figure 32—M. Nicaragua’s view of the Corridor



Once the drawings were complete, Fabricio and I had people share their drawings in like groups (Sirua management, field staff, and partner organizations) and then produce a shared statement per group. In those statements, and the plenary session that followed, simply by pairing them with others who had included that dimension, Cristian and Lenin's previously conservation-centric interpretations are broadened (at least publically) to include the human dimension. Cristian is paired with Julio to represent "partner organizations" and Lenin is paired with Fernando to represent "Sirua management":

- *"The Corridor is a geographic area of biological connectivity, whose objective is the coexistence of nature with local actors, for preservation and mutual benefit" (Cristian and Julio).*
- *"It is a real Corridor in Ecuador that connects two large reserves and allows us to have an area of conservation and protection of natural resources for different uses, with the end purpose of achieving sustainable development of human beings" (Lenin and Fernando)*

Although community members, Sirua rangers, and technical staff had highlighted human dimensions in their drawings and interpretations, when asked to provide shared statements, they neglect to mention the human elements so prominent in their drawings:

- *"For the communities of San Francisco and Ventanas it is a reserve that avoids contamination and maintains relationships with the environment."* (This does refer to the human element of access to clean water, but only very generally).
- *"It is a conservation area that acts as a bridge between the Awa reserve and the Cotacachi Cayapas Ecological Reserve, thereby giving benefit to the planet"* (Technical personnel of Sirua)

During the plenary, when asked to interpret similarities and differences in the drawings, Lenin quickly generalizes that they are 90% similar—all having the same ends and core concept of the Corridor (which is conservation-centric), but simply using different words. Valencia says he agrees but adds in the human dimension again by noting that the group has spoken several "big truths", including the fact that human beings are fundamental part of the Corridor, even as the Corridor is an area of conservation. I (Alfredo) then pushed the group to not over simplify our read of the similarities and differences, and to dig deeper for differences that can help us learn more for the planning process.

<p>Alfredo: I was concerned that the community voices were being excluded or pushed in a certain direction by virtue of being outnumbered. Besides</p>

ethical issues I saw this as a practical concern because I felt the analysis was suffering due to the attempt at a simplifying consensus proposed by Lenin.

I asked the community members why so much focus centered on naming the rivers. After Ulpiano begins to respond Lenin again interjects that it is because water as a resource is very important to the communities, in part because they have so many contaminated rivers, whereas clean water exists in the Corridor. Adding the rivers' names means the rivers are personal to them. Nicaragua then highlights the human element, noting the prevalence in the drawings of water as a source of life to people, as well as its function as an environmental service. Julio adds that he is intrigued by the notion of traditional conservation that is present in the community conceptions of the Corridor. This notion is different from the idea of "biological conservation combined with community outreach", which he says assumes that no local conservation is occurring. Finally, Fabricio notes that maybe we just need to recognize that *"there is a cultural value for people who have been living there for a long time, which should be taken into account when trying to understand the difference between natural and cultural values of the Corridor"* (Fabricio).

5.3.3. Analysis

The Corridor's existence as a real geographical space with measurably high levels of biodiversity and natural resources, legal (albeit contested) boundaries delimiting where it begins and ends, and marked differences between what is inside and outside its boundaries (e.g., massive deforestation and palm plantations outside), seems to make it sensible to qualify as a *biological* Corridor (see **Figure 33**). As a purely biological Corridor, standards of "good and bad" and "right and wrong" do not need to reference human purposes other than those of humans who desire to conserve the Corridor to fulfill its biotic purposes. "Biological Corridor" can be thought of as a cult value¹⁸ intended to generate behaviors and language

¹⁸ It is important to recall that cult values are not inherently negative but can be good, bad or both, depending on how different people interpret them, operationalize them, or are affected by them. "Cult" has obvious negative connotations in all the cultures in which I conducted my research, including my own. In fact, I have never used the word cult in a positive light. And indeed, in CRP, when taken to an extreme "cult value" means precisely this negative connotation I am referring to. But in CRP its main meaning lies in its ability to attribute overriding motives or personality to a social object—for good or bad—thus making it real for many humans that share the cult value. To remain consistent with CRP theory I use the term cult value throughout my thesis, but I

that reinforce understanding of the Corridor as an objective space with uniquely biological intentions. “Biological Corridor” attributes idealized, overriding motives or values to the social object Corridor—effectively giving it human-like traits or personality in its ability to have these biological intentions.

Figure 33—Picture of “the Corridor” from within



To recall, social objects can be thought of as generalized tendencies, common to large numbers of people who believe in the tangible existence of the object, to act in similar ways in similar situations (Stacey 2007: 313). A social object can be thought of as a tendency to treat a pattern of communicative social relations, such as an organization, *as if* it were a physical object—in spite of the fact that it only exists in inter-subjective human experience. These tendencies are expressed in repetitive, habitual patterns of action and can be further reinforced by norms, procedures and value statements (Stacey 2007: 313). Sirua’s mission, programmatic

wish to state emphatically that I do not intend to make negative value judgments through its use; rather, to highlight its role in attributing overriding motives to social objects.

activities, and discourse go a long way in selling the aspirational ideal that the Corridor is a biological Corridor, and this discourse is clearly present in Nicaragua's and Valencia's early interventions during the timeline exercise, as well as Lenin and Christian's drawings in the "what is the Corridor" exercise. All defend in different ways the "Awacachi Biological Corridor" construct, based on the "biological Corridor" cult value. Indeed, Lenin goes so far as to declare a consensus on the issues, with differences being no more than semantics, thus giving him confidence to speak on behalf of community members who are present.

However, the existence of humans in the Corridor effectively changes its landscape, thus revealing appreciative settings (very clear examples of *selective perception* in this case) based on diverse standards of fact and value and contested understandings of "what is the Corridor". As these diverse understandings are brought into contrast through images and communicative interaction that enables and constrains contested meanings, new meanings (i.e., new knowledge) begin to emerge, at least in discourse.

Figure 34—Community of San Francisco, nearby the Corridor



For example, in the course of these two exercises, the evening homework and the morning reflection, we (all participants) discovered that the selective perception (i.e., appreciative settings) of several Sirua rangers in particular was shifting. At the end of the first day (of this first workshop), Fabricio and I had assigned participants a homework exercise to brainstorm “conditions” that would be needed to sustainably conserve the Corridor (taking into account the challenges that had emerged in the various exercises of the day). The following morning, participants gave feedback on the prior day’s work, which revealed that a significant shift was occurring regarding the centrality of communities in relation to the Corridor. In that session, Ulpiano noted that he had enjoyed the drawings of the Corridor, *“because it helped us remember our ancestors, remember the train, the Cuchilla del Rey river. It was a great reminder of what’s has happened. So I liked it a lot”* (Ulpiano). Then Valencia spoke on behalf of the San Lorenzo technical staff by referring to the conversation they had had in their hotel room the night before as they were doing their “conditions” homework:

“We concluded as a group that the communities need to be involved in this process. We talked a lot about that taking into account that even if they are an intangible part of the Corridor, there should at least be a buffer zone so that people can interact with natural resources and learn. What most impacted me was the agreement of the group on this theme” (Valencia).

Indeed, their agreement was present in their overall vision that they presented later that day, which called for community involvement and the creation of a mixed-use buffer zone that serves to benefit communities (in addition to a strictly hand-off area). During the presentation of the vision, Manuel Valencia elaborated on the buffer zone idea:

“We speak of an intangible zone and a buffer zone because if... we want to maintain the whole thing untouchable the whole thing is going to turn into chaos. So why not take out 2000 hectares and say this is untouchable. And the rest we can manage with the communities, where perhaps we could carry out activities with the school kids, parish councils and other local actors. Because we know that this Corridor is in the middle of many communities and as long as they are there the Corridor will always depend on them; and they

on the Corridor... So let's do the investigation from the neighborhood school, let's do research by the biologist, this neighbor wants to work on planting the guayacán fruit., etc. And we have another space which is sacrosanct and we manage it that way" (Valencia).

With his interventions, Valencia has continued to protect the idea of a tangible biological Corridor by introducing humans as "intangible" parts of the Corridor. However, his sharing of group reflections from the previous evening on the need for a more realistic mixed use of the Corridor reveals the beginning of an important shift in the dominant patterns of conversation in the workshop, and in the overall action-research process—from a more narrow "security and protection" worldview to a broader, paradoxical perspective on the Corridor that sees communities as important allies as well as foes. The pattern of communication has begun to shift as diverse actors compare and contrast their different appreciations of the meaning of the Corridor. Interestingly, the most significant shift so far has occurred *outside* the facilitated workshop spaces, in organic "hotel room conversations" that emerged as the rangers and technical staff grappled with the idea of positive "conditions" for the future.

For now, I hypothesize that the introduction and isolation of contrasting perspectives did not cause but did influence this initial change in conversation, while also revealing interesting local knowledge on how the threat of mining was being perceived by SL staff, and how mining may present threats to individual security. Although the two community representatives were not able to share their perspectives in more detail (and in some cases, they were actively constrained), the prominence of multiple perspectives on the Corridor was clearly on the table, which continued to be developed in this first workshop. These emerging perspectives on the nature of the Corridor and the relationships between community and Corridor will continue to shift and emerge throughout the action-research process, but not without significant contestation from various fronts, as will be shown in the following section.

5.3.4. *The perspective of a powerful actor influences the workshop conversation and reveals significant local knowledge amongst the San Lorenzo staff*

Comparison of RECC and Corridor experiences

The Reserva Ecológica Cotacachi Cayapas, or “RECC” is an important Ecuadorian national park located to the south of the Corridor. On day two of the first workshop, the RECC director Fernando Morcillo, and his assistant, Patricio Caiza, spent the morning with us, first listening to the presentation of visions and conditions by the Sirua staff and then conducting a 90-minute presentation and feedback session on RECC priorities and strategies. Following Fernando Morcillo’s presentation, Fabricio and I facilitated a feedback session to capture reflections that might be relevant to our process. In the remainder of this section, I share elements of the feedback processes that emerged in-between presentations, which reveal new layers of staff knowledge and complexity *as Sirua staff compare their own situation to that of the RECC.*

Before beginning his RECC presentation, Fernando Morcillo first reacted to the presentation (by Sirua technical staff and rangers) he had just heard on change conditions, which had included the condition “*Secure spaces exist in which the armed forces are involved as a Corridor management and sustainability strategy*”. He first complemented the group on the strong leadership vision they had developed, and then very diplomatically took issue with the idea of considering collaboration with security forces as a central condition for conservation of the Corridor. He suggested instead that the group take the centrality of communities more seriously:

“Me as a manager of the area... the most important is working with communities because they are the most important beneficiaries. 50 rangers; without their [the community] help, doesn’t work. This idea of working with the police and the armed forces is dangerous. I prefer to be alone than to be with police and military, because the people become alarmed when they see these actors. But when there is real dialogue with communities they listen... They are part of this Corridor and are therefore the primary beneficiaries, whereas military and uniformed officers are a non-resort—that’s not the direction you want to go” (Fernando M).

He continues with the example of “the hunting threat” that had been mentioned earlier, noting that “*in the RECC—which is at a higher level of importance than the Corridor—“we” do not tell people not to hunt. We say go ahead and hunt, and they should hunt in the Corridor too, but in a sustainable way... it’s always been that way and you can’t stop that traditional practice. Because it’s been like that forever, you can’t say ‘sir this is a protected area, don’t hunt’. Instead, let’s talk. If you normally hunt 5 animals per week hunt one, because many things come out of here that benefit you*” (Fernando M.).

Fernando's intervention inspired a series of reactions from the Sirua field staff (Teófilo, Nicaragua, and Valencia), politely retorting that things are not so simple in *their* reality. The following exchange is illustrative:

Teófilo: What you say is right, but we come across people that don't think that way. They say *'I'm going to hunt today, tomorrow and the next day'*.

Fernando M: Yes, but if you have the community convinced about the benefits of the Corridor's environmental services then they themselves will help control the hunting. They have to feel that this Corridor is theirs too.

Teófilo: In the communities, like in San Francisco—and we have a member present (referring to Ulpiano of San Francisco)—when we tell someone *'don't cut trees'*, they respond: *'OK, you who has his salary, you're not worried about survival. You don't want me to cut down the tree? Pay my gas and my day's wages'*. So many times—and it's not really to offend the person who enters to take down a tree—that's why we ask for the presence of uniformed officers. Maybe the people will have that fear to cut down the tree...

Fernando M: I understand exactly what you're saying... (he tries to get in the conversation)

Valencia: What happens is that we've found the hunting locations in the Corridor. We have 2-3 in San Francisco, 1-2 in Alto Tambo, etc. (neighboring communities). These are recidivists that have been doing this for 15 years, not for hundreds of years (challenging the idea of traditional community practices). We've tried approaching them in many ways and haven't had results. It's not that the whole community is busy hunting. When we call in the police, armed forces, etc., it's to stop that Fernando Morcillo (he uses Fernando's name to personalize his example)—who we've already told 20,000 times and he is incapable of hearing us, because he doesn't want to...

Nicaragua: Another situation. Yesterday we also talked about the Colombian effect and the Corridor could become a base of training. This is why we need their presence—patrols to maintain security. If we have continued insecurity we will never have ecotourism.

Fernando M: But what happens when the community actually believes [in protecting the Corridor] (he gives an example of a large area in the RECC that is effectively covered by only 4 rangers)? We have agreements with many communities, [organizations including] Sirua, and others. These communities do their own security. They make sure outsiders don't enter their Corridor. They get training; make a living from the Corridor... The community is there permanently; the police won't be there permanently...

Nicaragua: Very important what you're saying Fernando. The problem is with the education and cultural level of the people in this area (he gives an example of a community in the RECC—Playa de Oro—that sees the RECC as a reserve and respects it). The community of San Francisco on the other hand is a community that has always survived on wood exploitation... Alto Tambo is the same... It's real hard to change

them over night... We need to start in the education level with kids so that they can change the conversation in their families...

Figure 35—Fernando Morcillo's presentation (Fernando is second person from left, sitting down)



Valencia then pushes further by asking Fernando if they have colonos (migrant squatters) “loose” in the RECC, to which he replies that they do not—they only have social organizations and communities. Valencia uses this as a prime differentiator with the Corridor, which is full of *“loose blacks, Awa communities and loose mestizos from neighboring communities”* (Valencia). Combined with mining and other community conflicts, this situation makes the Corridor an eminently fragile environment. Community engagement as Fernando has suggested might work with less conflictual communities, such as Ventanas and Eldorado, but perhaps not as an overall strategy. Undeterred, Fernando M. pushes back, stating that “you” can have 20–30 rangers, but you cannot do anything without the community. *“This is what we’re doing here, let’s do it in San Francisco. Call the people to put in their point of view. They live in the sector. We need to change our mentalities”* (Fernando M.).

Fernando M. then made a long presentation on the RECC and shared challenges and strategies that he uses as the park director. Post-presentation reflections revealed that Fernando’s emphasis on a proactive, central community engagement strategy was indeed interesting to consider for the Corridor. Teófilo, Manuel Valencia, Nicaragua, and Coronel Hernandez (a Sirua board member) were really taken by the idea of making proactive community relations a main strategy, at least in some communities. Again, the following exchange is illustrative:

Manuel Valencia: For me it is the idea of working with the rangers in the communities on the most important themes. Because we have a problem with how our rangers are perceived by the community, including myself. Five or six years ago we had rangers that got to each community and it yielded positive results for us. That happened in Alto Tambo and Durango. We would let people know about the themes in the Corridor, talk about the problems in the community—indeed, the purpose wasn't so much to talk about environmental themes, but rather things of day to day life, like accidents. That helped us develop a good relationship with some members of communities; not with all but this was already something. After that we changed supervisors and started other things and that practice went by the wayside. But I think that our rangers, including myself, should take this up again in certain communities.

Teófilo: I take away that the Foundation and community need to march hand in hand to take the Corridor forward.

Nicaragua: It is much easier to go to communities, than for community members to show up to an event in San Lorenzo, for example. As such Sirua should go to communities, utilizing high quality visual presentations like we saw here (which included pictures of RECC staff in communities), and sharing all the work we do as a foundation. We could give talks; invite them to a “field day” to get to know our Corridor so that they have the opportunity to see the riches that they have and know how to respect them.

Fernando Echeverria: I have similar ideas to Nicaragua: 1) Visit the people frequently to make friends and know what they think; 2) maintain a presence in key places so that they know we are the owners of the land; 3) include community members in meetings; 4) put up fences *together* to show the limits of the property lines with neighbors; and 5) educate and communicate the Corridor's importance with the communities”. (Fernando E. also notes that Sirua has had an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the RECC since two years ago that they have not put to use. They could be carrying out some joint patrols, and sharing GIS info.)

Later in the reflection, community member Ulpiano, and Julio from FFI, both highlight Fernando Morcillo's cautionary note regarding the use of security forces in the Corridor, with Ulpiano emphasizing the idea “*to not put in police, but to handle things communally*”. Finally, several people mentioned Fernando M.'s open invitation to collaborate more actively with the RECC by exercising the existing MOU between RECC and Sirua.

5.3.5. Sirua and FFI leadership begin to notice the value of participation of local staff, including their significant knowledge of Corridor issues

At the beginning of the second day of the workshop, Julio reflected how he is becoming aware of the knowledge the field staff possesses. He stated he was pleasantly surprised by the level of analysis of the whole group, and initial signs of ownership they are taking: “*All of yesterday was interesting because I saw you working as a team. I'm not saying you usually don't but yesterday I really saw you producing (i.e. being productive); using that knowledge that each of*

them has, to, to improve the Corridor. From having the historic side of things of what occurred, as well as expressing what each individual wants, but really working together for Sirua. Additionally, all the information that was generated I would like to highlight because it wasn't just the higher ups in Sirua or the operational side of things, but a broad dialogue and I found that interesting" (Julio). In addition, during the day two end-of-day feedback session, Fernando Echeverria similarly echoes his pleasant surprise at the contributions of the San Lorenzo field staff present: *"After the presentation that Manuel made... I didn't think that the rest of the Sirua team was that conscious of many of the problematic themes we are dealing with. I thought that in many cases the idea was 'this is my salary, I am paid to work in these specific things, and the rest don't ask me about it because I don't care'. So seeing that the team of technical workers developed the same ideas Julio and I developed—it's the same thing really with different words but similar ideas, perspectives and questions. I feel very, very happy because I can see that there is a team that is aware and is concerned. Because, although we don't have many spaces like these, one thinks that they don't share the same worries, or that they take things very lightly. So I think that has been the most valuable thing so far, and in this space it is like I am discovering this"* (Fernando).

Teófilo responds to Fernando's surprise by noting that *"those of us in Sirua are always conscious of the problematic situations we face"*, but that due to poor communication, it is only now that Fernando *"has discovered this capacity that we have shown right now"* (Teófilo). Nicaragua adds that it is thanks to this (workshop) space that *"each of us has contributed valuable ideas, worries, and possible solutions to the problems that we face,"* thus demonstrating that the team *"works."* However, Valencia expresses his worry that his team's analysis has been too local—*"were stuck in municipal ordinances"*. He notices how the conditions put forward by the management team are more macro, and as such, perhaps more strategic (See **section 5.4.3.** for the original change conditions). Julio disagrees, emphasizing that what has actually been most valuable about this space and the analysis of both groups has been the different perspectives each has brought to the table. *"So for me this space is very valuable..., because your local analysis is what you are actually living day to day. And maybe the more global analysis that you're not working with might not have been the best use of your time. We too, we are seeing things from the outside. It's the overall group coming together that brings value. So you guys did the analysis you needed to, and so did we, and when we combine the two points of view the results were much stronger than if we had all been working on the global issues or all had been working on the local issues"* (Julio).

A few days after the workshop, Fabricio and I interviewed Fernando to reflect a bit more on the first workshop and get on the same page for the upcoming second event. In the interview, he revealed further surprise about the input of the field staff and community members:

“Another thing I liked and wasn’t expecting was the high level of critical thinking in the people, in everyone. For example Teófilo is a person that normally talks a lot, but the first day he was mostly quiet. So Julio comes up to me and asks ‘I thought you said Teófilo is the one who speaks the most?’ And I told him ‘I don’t know, maybe he’s a bit timid because he’s meeting new people and according to him this is his first workshop’. But then the second day I saw that he started to speak, act and bring really good ideas. The same thing with the community participants: although Orlando registered his complaints and all of that I also saw him collaborating a lot. And it’s a shame he had to go because towards the end he was really getting into it” (Fernando E.)

The overall impact of incorporation of these different perspectives can be seen in the strategic plan, as well as in organizational discourse on the issue, including in the following presentation by Fernando of the draft strategic plan in June 2010 (9 months later):

“The Corridor is an area of biological importance that must be conserved because it provides environmental services and it is extremely rich at a global level in fauna and flora. That said it is not the same for the local government..., for whom the Corridor is a source of water. Meanwhile the communities see it as a source of wood, minerals or also as a source of water. And the rangers might see it as the place in which they work and live. Therefore it is important that we respect the perspectives of the different actors and we include them in the Corridor with the idea that we might be able to join forces and work harmoniously...”

Local staff knowledge was also highlighted as an opportunity in the strategic plan: *“We have trained and motivated personnel who are from the region and hold cultural and historical knowledge. This gives us a key advantage for navigating the tremendous complexity in which the Corridor and Sirua are immersed.”*

5.3.6. Analysis

Fernando Morcillo’s presence and presentation was an example of SST in that he offered a clear perspective that was different from the perspectives of most Sirua staff who participated. This difference in perspective was contested almost entirely by the San Lorenzo staff (Fernando Echeverria and Julio Bernal were virtually silent) citing practical examples of how the Corridor context was different from the RECC context. This difference in specific context appears to have generated the major difference in perspective, and not a core difference in worldview between Fernando Morcillo and the Sirua staff. Nonetheless, different core perspectives were

present that allowed for a structured discussion on different ways of seeing conservation in neighboring territories. Fernando's examples generated a strong reaction by the Sirua staff *as they compared their own situation to that of the RECC*.

Fabricio and I did not anticipate the reaction from the Sirua technical staff and had invited RECC representatives as just "one more" good perspective that we hoped would enrich analysis of Corridor challenges. The participants themselves turned it into a "soft systems exchange" of sorts (i.e., active comparing of perspectives). However, as an interesting side effect, organizational leaders witnessed the Sirua field-staff take the lead in politely contesting and constraining Fernando's wisdom. They did not stubbornly reject his ideas, but rather provided him specific context about the Corridor that rendered some of his ideas less relevant. Fernando Morcillo's main emphasis was on proactive community engagement and environmental education, yet the RECC lands were not acquired in the same way as the Corridor, and as such, do not have the kind of preexisting conflicts with the communities with which Sirua deals. This high-level contestation generates dialogue in Julio and Fernando's own minds, which they later share. Their appreciative settings are changing as they learn of the depth of local knowledge and its competent expression in conversation with the RECC director.

Both the timeline and the "what is the Corridor exercise" enabled the exchange of knowledge that had not been previously shared before between the two offices, or even within the SL office. The timeline allowed for personalized construction and interpretation of an overall picture of "facts" at personal, global, and Corridor levels. In these exercises, individual ideas were considered valid *before* collective ideas, and the facts on the different timelines were based on recollected experience from personal and professional biographies. The Corridor drawings were situated in each person's subjective experience—i.e., how each person interprets the Corridor—which, in effect, avails multiple individual perspectives as a source

of potential comparison and contrast. Although the reflection period to this exercise did not generate a rich debate (as did the timeline), the contrast between Lenin and Christian's conservation-centric drawings was stark when compared with the community drawings, and to the mixed-use drawings of Fernando and Julio, and other participants. The different drawings contained expressions of worldviews and literal understandings of the purpose of a real geographical area with its issues. This provided another validation of the existence of different perspectives, which contributed to the overall pattern of communication in the first workshop, and effectively began broadening the meaning of the cult value "Biological Corridor".

As we saw, the San Lorenzo field staff perspective on communities shifted the first evening as shared by Valencia on the morning of day 2 (and included in that group's theory of change visions and conditions). Then, in response to Fernando Morcillo's downplaying of the desirability of involving armed security forces, and insisting on a community involvement perspective, they provide a more nuanced view of communities, which highlights the unique nature of their own community challenges when compared to the RECC. Again, in the post RECC plenary, we see that in spite of their valid rebuttals and clarifications, Manuel Valencia, Teófilo, Nicaragua, and Fernando Echeverría have all taken away the importance of a more genuine community engagement strategy than they are currently doing. Even as they actively constrained many of Fernando Morcillo's points, he has clearly influenced participant perspectives. Their own appreciative settings have continued to evolve, including the emergence of an increased capacity to defend their positions based on real life experience, even as they start to see new perspectives over time.

Hauck (2004: 18), who studied the organizational capacity of a hospital that operates in a highly complex environment, notes that the exchange of tacit learning is perhaps the most important factor underpinning the capacity of that organization. This type of learning can be made available through

social interaction, exchanges of ideas, reflections on values, self-assessment, and a general spirit of openness (Hauck, 2004: 18). In these examples, complexity is revealed by helping surface knowledge from different perspectives in ways that altered the patterns of communication in the workshop. In other words, complexity exists in people's knowledge and lived experience, and relevant complexity can be accessed by providing contrasting experiences and perspectives, and generating reflective dialogue between them. In this case, capacity-building, in part, is about making existing knowledge (tacit or explicit) usable for organizational purposes. The processes of knowledge sharing from different perspectives (in the different moments presented thus far), have contributed to a shift in the overall patterns of communication to include a more central focus on communities and less of a focus on security and control. Additionally, Fernando and Julio, in particular, are "seeing" the value of local staff participation in a new light as local knowledge emerges in reflective communication. Appreciative settings are emerging in important streams of organizational communication, and thereby, setting the stage for important conversation shifts that will occur in the remainder of the Sirua action-research process.

As a final note, ethical considerations exist regarding the participation of different actors in this process. Community members and Sirua staff are two examples of stakeholders who have much to gain or lose from this strategy. The two community members present for parts of the first workshop were lightly marginalized and actively constrained by the same technical staff slowly displaying a change of heart in their position towards communities. I return to this theme (methodology and power relations) in **chapter 7**.

5.4. Deep assumptions that reflect significant external and internal complexity are revealed via relational analysis and “redundant” methodology. These assumptions mature over the course of the process via successive approximations

About halfway through the action-research process with Sirua, Fernando and I were having an informal conversation when he mentioned that he found the methodology to be a bit “redundant”. However, before I could react, he clarified that he saw this as a strength of the methodology, even though at first, he had felt some things were simply repetitive. Julio made a similar comment in the closing evaluation in June 2010: *“Sometimes the methodology seemed redundant to me and produced similar things. That doesn’t mean it’s a bad thing because I feel that that type of repetition, with similar products once-again appearing, was important. Because they validated the results and really confirmed that what we were obtaining wasn’t a product from a moment of euphoria in the workshop; rather the different activities confirmed that the different products were indeed important because they would once again appear. So it might have seemed redundant but that redundancy seemed important to me. Not like in other processes in which we already finished an exercise, and we take these products as a reduction and then look for new information somewhere else”* (Julio).

Interestingly, this reflection also appeared in the process I was facilitating with PDTG and so got me thinking about the source of this redundancy (which was not consciously intentional), as well as the extent to which it helped Sirua strengthen its capacities to deal with the complexity it faced. Upon reflection with both of my co-researchers, we identified the following significant examples of methodological redundancy in the Sirua process:

- Taking a well-processed piece of work from an earlier workshop moment and intentionally trying to improve it, or in some cases, using it only as an input for a new exercise (when participants assumed it was “finished”)
- Taking ideas that had already been significantly processed and seeking out systemic relationships between those ideas
- Using post-it notes to continue questioning and “leave open” seemingly finished analyses. Also, using questions in other moments to keep inquiry open
- Recording assumptions from multiple exercises and intentionally improving them later in the process. Similarly, continually improving conditions, strategies and other elements of the strategic plan throughout the process

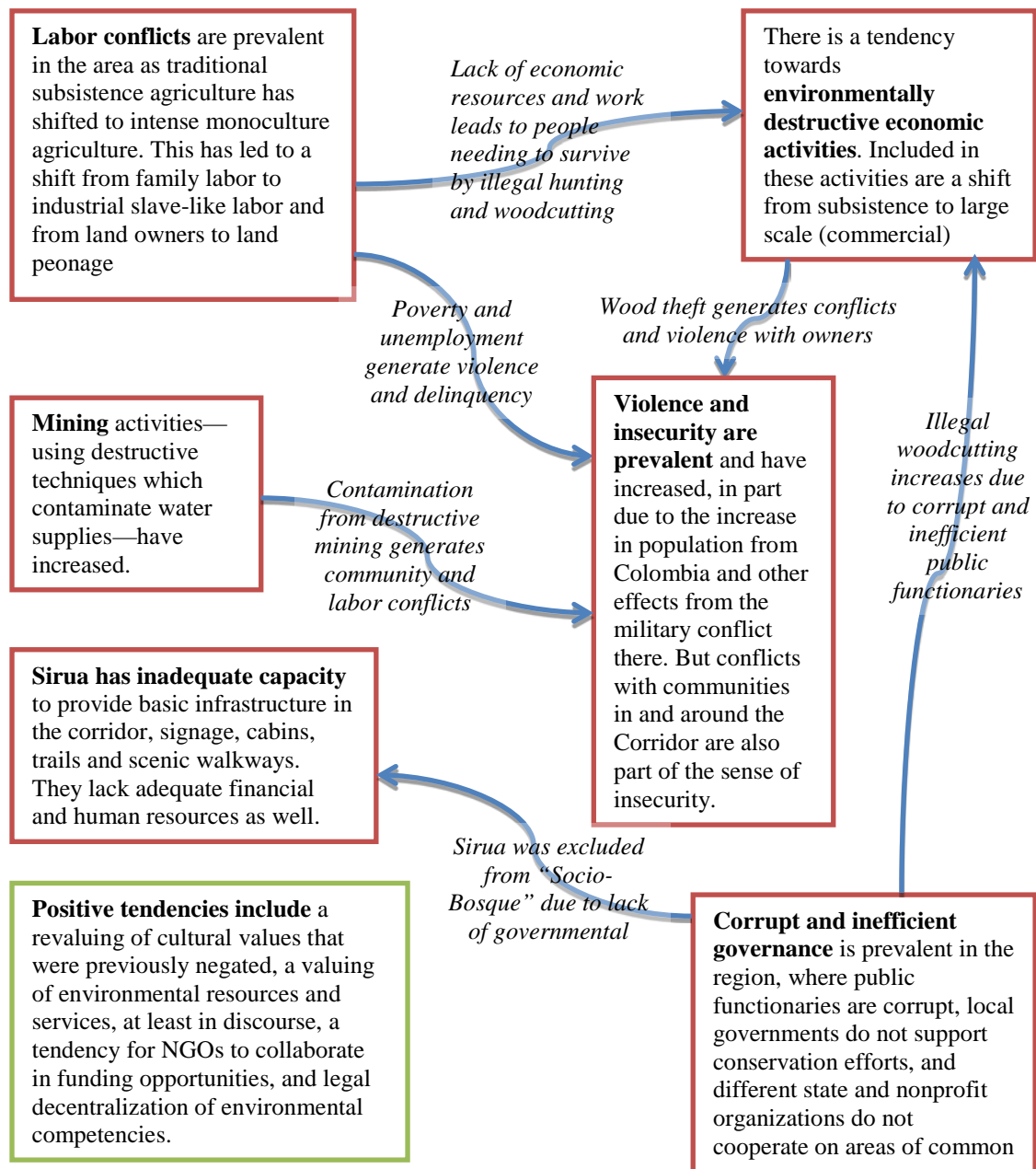
In the remainder of this section, I share how we (facilitators) used “redundant” methodology to develop a composite picture of Corridor challenges and change conditions, and how change assumptions matured in the process.

5.4.1. Key challenges are mapped and iteratively prioritized as participants enable and constrain each other in reflective conversation via successive approximations

5.4.1.1. Original challenges from WS1

Primarily informed by the timeline analysis and the analysis of “what is the Corridor” in workshop 1, we (all participants, with Fabricio and I both facilitating and participating, at the end of the first day) conducted a mapping exercise to identify key challenges to the Corridor. In **Figure 36**, I present the main challenges that emerged. The original challenge categories in red boxes (labor conflicts, mining, etc.) did not include inferences on the relationships between these issues. For that reason, on day 3 of the first workshop, Fabricio and I asked a small group to identify some key relationships between challenge areas. This simple analysis began connecting environmental problems with socioeconomic problems, which revealed important assumptions in the process (e.g., see arrows: “*Lack of economic resources and work leads to people needing to survive by illegal hunting and woodcutting*”; “*Poverty and unemployment generate violence and delinquency*”).

Figure 36—Initial map of challenges affecting the CBA



About a week later, in workshop 2 in Quito, our goal was to create an updated map that would take the challenges from workshop 1 as an input, but would talk them through a bit more strategically and identify core assumptions underlying them, which would essentially consolidate our problem analysis for the strategic plan. To do so, we divided into two mixed groups—1) Rob, Lenin, and Julio, 2) Fernando, Kerstin, and Manuel Valencia—and then carried out the following steps.

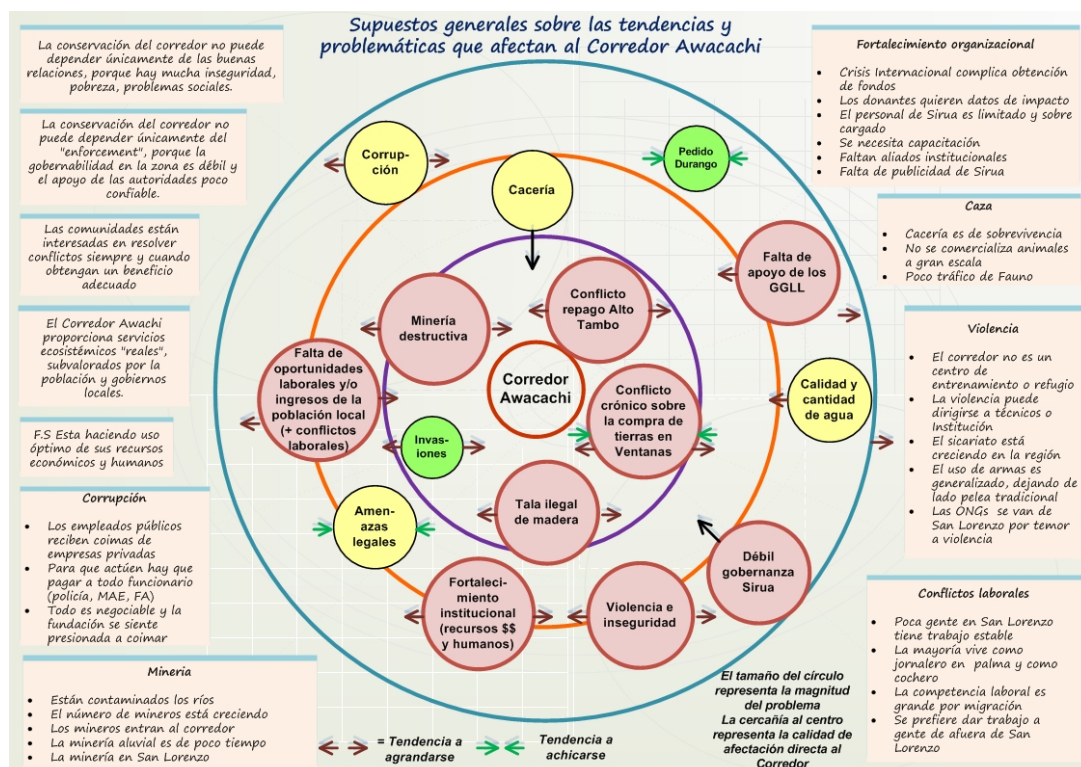
- 1) On a full size flip chart, each group was to draw a circle with the middle representing the Corridor, and then add specific challenges to the drawing as circles as well:

- a. Using larger circles to denote importance of the problem
 - b. Placing the circles closer or further from the center to denote level of direct impact on the Corridor. Closer in, more direct the impact.
 - c. Using arrows pointing in or out to denote the tendency of the problem
- 2) Once each group is complete, write down on pink cards up to five assumptions (written in affirmative statements) that support your analysis. On the back of each card write down:
 - a. How do you know?
 - b. What do you not know?
 - c. What questions do you have about this assumption?
 - 3) Each group then shared their work in plenary as we all constructed a shared version of the challenges map and used the assumptions to make final changes to the map.
 - 4) Each group had printed results from the previous workshop (which I had presented at the beginning of the day) as an input to this exercise.

5.4.1.2. Updated challenges and assumptions

The results in diagram form are in **Figure 37** complemented by the analysis below (the map is in Spanish and is only included to show the concept):

Figure 37—Digitized updated challenge map with assumptions



In the process, participants informed each other of what they knew or did not know about the challenges to the Corridor and asked further questions about different issues to clarify or challenge analyses. In the back and forth of presentation and dialogue, we (all participants) learned that the most important conflicts that participants perceive to be affecting the Corridor directly are:

- a) An increase in destructive mining (as a tendency);
- b) Chronic conflicts with the communities of Alto Tambo and Ventanas, who continue demanding repayment for the prior sale of their lands; and
- c) Illegal woodcutting as a small problem that is currently expanding.

Mining emerged as a major theme from Fernando's group, but not from the other group: *"Destructive mining is mostly a phenomenon outside the Corridor, but as those resources dwindle the Corridor becomes more attractive"* (Rob). But Fernando later replies: *"We disagree with the other group on mining, which we placed closer to the Corridor in impact. People have already sold veins/seams of gold in the Corridor claiming the land is theirs when it is actually in the Corridor. Some of the areas are difficult to access—around Ventanas for example—and therefore difficult to spot and remove miners (police and marines won't go in there because of laziness). The mining is sediment-based (alluvial) so it won't be a long term problem, but it is currently increasing"* (Fernando). After Fernando's intervention, the group quickly agreed to add it as a major threat. However, in the assumptions, it became clear that not much is known in detail about mining:

- We know that they use cyanide without pools to separate the ore. But we don't know until when the mining will last. How much do they really make with this kind of mining?

Regarding **community conflicts**, the assumptions matured from WS 1, when some very optimistic assumptions on community motivations had emerged, e.g.,: a) If the community understands the importance of the Corridor, that will facilitate coordinated activities that yield mutual benefit, and b) A well-informed community convinced of the benefits of the Corridor will support its care and security. In fact, in the initial presentation, as I debriefed the first workshop, I highlighted to the participants that the assumptions generated so far were of mixed quality, which included some questionable assumptions. Now in WS 2, the new assumption regarding community motivation was as follows:

- *Communities are interested in resolving conflicts if and when they obtain adequate benefit in return. (also see **section 5.4.3**)*

This assumption was certainly more realistic than the previous assumptions on this theme, but the participants noted that the issue is even more complex. Sirua has had experiences with communities that say they are interested in dialogue, only to contradict that with their actions (they provide several examples). At the same time, they note that they “know” that various communities are currently participating in a positive way with Sirua on economic development projects. However, they do not know if an alternative actually does exist in the community leaders’ minds to further repayment for lands, nor do they know the power structure within the communities of Alto Tambo (El Dorado immigrants) and Ventanas. They leave with the open questions: *Who are the best leaders to negotiate agreements of mutual benefit and how can we better understand conflict from a theoretical standpoint?*

Regarding **woodcutting**, Lenin was emphatic that the problem is significant, in contradiction to Fernando’s original interview (and assertions in this session), and in contradiction to the other group, that did not list it as a big problem. Fernando did not challenge this idea in plenary in either of the first two workshops, so it made it onto the list of major challenges.

The issue of poverty due to **lack of economic opportunities**—among other causes—was repeated from the first workshop and listed as an important underlying cause to all the immediate threats (mining, community conflicts, and woodcutting). As such, maintaining good relationships with communities and other key actors is an insufficient strategy, because high levels of insecurity, poverty and social problems occur in the region. Sirua knows this because of first-hand experience—e.g., abrupt negative changes in situations previously going well; by observing how violence and poverty have influenced behaviors in the region, including how pressure on the Corridor increases during annual festivals. What they do not know is what tendencies will emerge in the region regarding social conflicts, and they ask themselves: *Is an alternative, comprehensive strategy needed to adapt conservation to this unstable and difficult context?*

Fernando’s group also highlighted the economic opportunities issue, noting in their assumptions that few people in San Lorenzo have stable jobs, and those that do work tend to work as day laborers in the palm industry or as drivers. Increased competition for jobs occurs due to Colombian immigration, which is made worse by the assumption of local employers that local people are lazy. Outside of palm and mussel harvesting, little work is available, especially now that wood has dried up. This group asks: *how much longer will refugees from Colombia be allowed in and what capacity for new jobs is there really in this region?*

Additionally, the following problems were mapped as significant, but with less direct influence on the Corridor:

- The region's violence and insecurity, and how it affects the Sirua staff
- Endemic corruption in most actors, and how that creates expectations for bribery
- Sirua's own weak organizational capacity and governance, including open questions on the limits of FFI's support, and lack of alliances that should be developed through a functioning board
- Lack of local government support and lack of institutional-level support from the Ministry of Environment (MAE)

This leads to the following open questions that reveal lack of knowledge of the plans and priorities of the key actors in the region: *How much interest do these actors actually have in helping our cause; and who among these actors is more likely to be a good ally?*

Lastly, the group noted smaller problems not significantly affecting the Corridor, including hunting, land invasions, and the conflict with Durango. In workshop 1, the group had noted ***hunting*** as an activity that was moving from small to commercial scale. Fernando clarifies that hunting is in fact not really that big a threat. Rather, it is a stable subsistence activity in which a community member might hunt two guantas (a small wild pig), eat one and sell the other to his neighbor, for example; a situation that is not at all like the large-scale hunting that occurs in the Amazon region of Ecuador. His group substantiates this lack of significant threat in its assumptions:

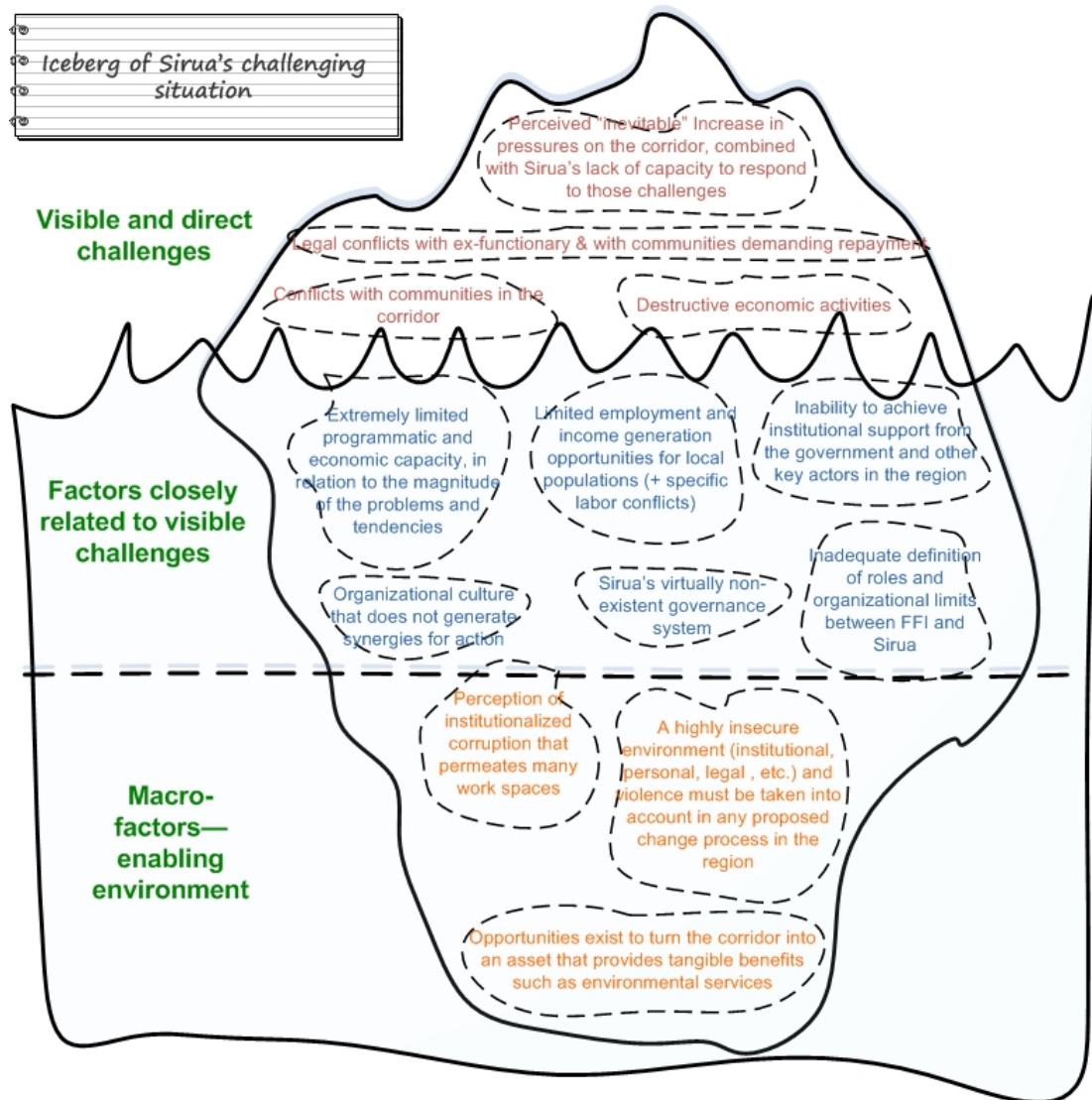
- The Awa (indigenous group) hunt for survival and the afros for sport or subsistence; both at small scale
- We know who the hunters are, where they live, and what their actual jobs are
- Hunting is focused on the guanta (a small wild pig), mountain rat, and wild turkeys
- We do not know if the Corridor even has many animals or if it is an empty forest. We also do not know if the loggers traffic in animals
- We wonder: why is there no large-scale trafficking? How much can you really hunt without affecting the species?

Fabricio and I did not ask for opportunities specifically, but had asked for major themes and challenges that affect the Corridor, positively or negatively. The fact that ***Sirua is the only conservation organization located in the immediate area*** was seen as an opportunity, as was the ***availability of environmental services from the Corridor***. Both these items emerged in the

first workshop, but were further developed through assumptions. Specifically, a belief exists that the Corridor provides real ecosystem services that are undervalued by the local populations and the local governments. Some rivers actually begin in the Corridor, and the water in the Corridor—based on their experience so far—seems to be healthy (also, communities take water out of the Corridor). However, no actual tests about the quantity or quality of water are available, nor how much water the Corridor might provide proportionally to other sources. Also, no hydrological information is available about the rivers. As such, participants ask: *Is it feasible that users pay for their water? How has water quality and quantity changed and how will climate change affect this?* If the water is available as a reliable source for neighboring San Lorenzo this could play well, because due to water problems in that city, there is increased awareness of the importance of ecosystem services.

In our last major meeting with Sirua in October 2009 (what we refer to as workshop 4), Fabricio and I presented the challenge map to organizational leaders as an iceberg, to help communicate key challenges more clearly (see **figure 38**). I had taken the circular challenges map (**Figure 37**) and reorganized it to show factors that were more visible and direct at the tip of the iceberg, with related but less visible factors underneath the water. Participants in the meeting immediately validated the new version and affirmed that it was much clearer than the previous version (while making some small adjustments). This iceberg appeared in the final strategic plan, along with an explanation of the challenges and opportunities within.

Figure 38—Final challenges map updated as an iceberg (translated for case study)



5.4.2. Analysis

At a superficial level of analysis, the back and forth exchange presented in this section is simply brainstorming, organizing and improving of ideas, not unlike any other simple planning process that seeks to get ideas onto the table and slowly, or quickly, improve them into workshop "products". The difference that I wish to highlight is that the ideas that end up as "product" have a genealogy that weaves different people's experiences into a narrative, and that narrative is generated as people: a) inform each other by introducing ideas derived from their experience, and b) enable and constrain each other in the process by expressing preference for certain ideas over others, but also expressing local identity, individual personality,

and worldviews. The final product is not an ideal version that represents Sirua's "best" thinking. Rather, the final product represents the dominant thinking that emerged in the back and forth gesturing, enabling, and constraining of ideas. The quality of that thinking in large part depends on the extent to which the "right" participants—i.e., those participants who represent the diverse complexity that Sirua faces—were in the room, and the extent to which the methodology supported deep sharing of experiences, so that the "right" participants might actually share what they know.

Learning, in this example, occurs when the dominant assumptions about Sirua's challenges, as expressed in the patterns of communicative interaction of the participants present, shift in some way. Thus far we can see how the presentation of detailed local knowledge about hunting reduces hunting to an insignificant challenge. Up until this point, hunting was included generically as a major challenge because no local knowledge had emerged to challenge this assumption at an organizational level. New knowledge about mining, community conflicts and other themes is also generating major or minor shifts in patterns of communication. This new knowledge is emerging and shifting as part of a broader narrative in which ideas are maturing and organizational identity is morphing as Sirua comes to know itself better. This occurs as Sirua participants become more fluent in their own, constantly evolving patterns of communicative interaction. This is learning.

What does method have to do with this learning? For example:

- The methods used in these exercises are largely conversational. The challenges map in **Figure 36**, if the arrows are removed, is nothing more than a map of static ideas—i.e., strong statements about problems. When the arrows are added, a story begins to emerge—a conversation starts about the relationships in real life between otherwise static ideas. Conducting relational/systemic mapping might seem

redundant for some, but it brings conversation to life, and thus, links a specific analysis to broader individual and organizational narratives.

- The maps are artefacts—props in the drama in Shaw's (2002) terms—and used as tools to generate deep conversation that challenges and improves ideas and positions (i.e. they are “epistemological devices” Checkland, 2000). The map is a marker, a pretext, around which we (all participants) conducted a whole morning of sharing, challenging and sense-making (see **Figure 39**). We (Fabricio and I) were not in a rush to get to the answer, or to some matrix of rational thought. Instead, we used the “product” as a reference point around which to conduct deep, reflective conversation capable of shifting patterns of understanding.



- We already had a map coming into the second workshop and could have just chosen to improve that version. Alternatively, as in many processes in which I have participated, we could have taken it to be finished analysis and moved onto a new “step”. Instead, we (Fabricio and me) provided the map to participants as a pure input to be taken into

consideration. The literal use of previous group knowledge keeps narrative alive, but without forcing participants down paths that have not been given enough of an opportunity to be informed and challenged by more perspectives and in a different moment. Again, this is redundant, but spending additional time to deepen the conversation revealed important elements that exposed significant new complexity.

- Requesting underlying assumptions and formulation of targeted questions of most analyses appears to help people hold what they know in parenthesis, and thereby promote a culture of inquiry rather than problem solving. This also makes it OK to not know and encourages additional sharing of experience.
- Having different groups produce the same maps as an input to generating the group map could also been seen as redundant. However, this allowed for a more detailed sharing of experience at the group level, and also a richer dialogue when groups could counterpose their ideas with another group's ideas. In the process, participants' perceptions, tacit and explicit knowledge are counterposed, thus sharpening the enabling-constraints to which ideas are subjected.

5.4.3. The emergence of “strategic” change conditions

A similar cycle of introducing, processing and improving ideas continued as we (the overall group) began addressing “Change conditions”. In this section, I wish to highlight how the use of “systemic mapping” between change conditions surfaces important assumptions, and how these assumptions continue to “mature”, iteratively over different exercises.

5.4.3.1. Systemic analysis of conditions reveals shifting of assumptions

Change conditions were developed over several methodological moments, beginning in WS 1 with the following original conditions, developed in two groups (a leadership group and Sirua technical staff¹⁹):

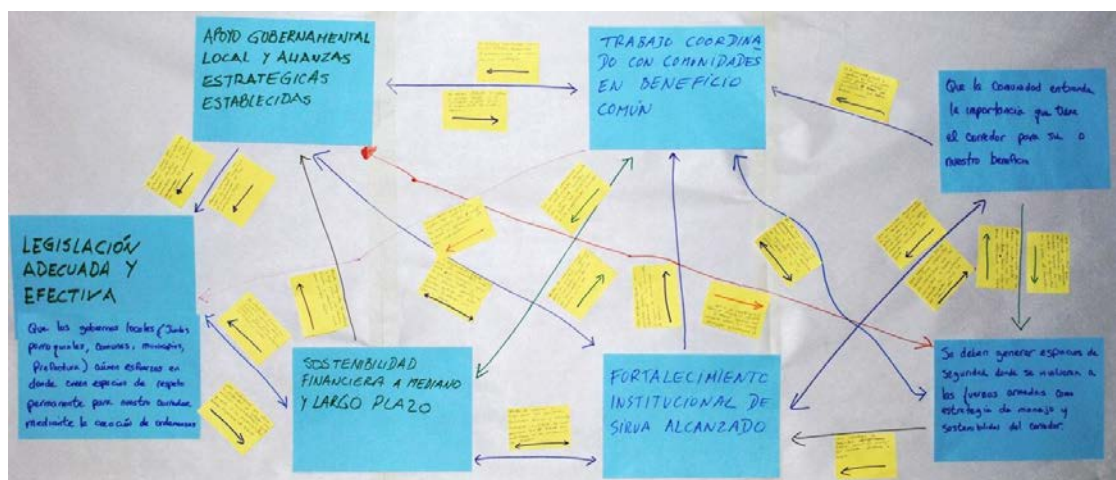
- a) Local governmental support exists and strategic alliances are established
(leadership group)

¹⁹ Again, this separation was an intentional use of SST. We were trying to draw out differences in perspective that might exist between these two levels of hierarchy.

- b) Coordinated work with communities is done for common benefit (*leadership group*)
- c) The community understands the importance that the Corridor has for their or our benefit (*operational field staff*)
- d) Secure spaces should be generated in which the armed forces (primarily the police and marines) are involved as a Corridor management and sustainability strategy (*operational field staff*)
- e) Sirua's institutional strength is achieved (*leadership group*)
- f) Financial sustainability exists in the medium and long term (*leadership group*)
- g) Adequate and effective legislation exists in support of the Corridor (including local ordinances) (*Both groups, with leadership focused on macro and local staff focused on municipal ordinances*)

Once these conditions were written out on cards, we (all participants) conducted a “systemic” analysis of each condition and a mapping of relationships between conditions. The “systemic analysis of each condition” exercise was essentially a series of critical questions of each condition—a) asking why each condition is important, b) identifying risks inherent in each condition and elements clearly outside our control (so as to not think of conditions as “causable”), and c) potential actions that might contribute to that condition (in general, not just Sirua actions). The “mapping of relationships between conditions” exercise (see **Figure 40**) was simply an identification of important conceptual relationships between conditions (yellow cards), placed on arrows between those conditions (blue cards).

Figure 40—important relationships between conditions



These analyses (carried out on days 2 and 3 of WS1, after Fernando Morcillo's RECC presentation) drew out additional complexity and revealed important assumptions on change through relational analysis and debate (selected examples):

– **Regarding the involvement of armed security services**

Valencia begins by stating that it is clear that the situation in the RECC and Corridor are very different. Therefore, although Fernando M.'s observations are valid regarding armed forces (see **section 5.3.4.**), the Corridor is different. He then justifies why this condition (condition "d" above) remains important even after Fernando's challenges; mainly to provide security for future ecotourism initiative, and to discourage mining. But this comes with risks, including the fact communities do not look favorably upon their presence, which might damage the current level of relations Sirua has with communities. Also, Sirua does not have the resources to convene these security actors consistently, and even if they did, once present, they retain their own authority—i.e., they are uncontrollable. These pros and cons were evident in the assumptions generated in the mapping of relationships between conditions

- (b–d) In the long term, the presence of armed forces can generate safe spaces in communities and for the Corridor. (Related to tourism)
- (c–d) The involvement of armed forces can create resistance in the communities, in response to anything Sirua does

– **Regarding the development of alliances**

Important questions were raised, such as whether or not other actors are really interested in allying with Sirua, and if they are, whether Sirua is prepared to accept impositions implicit in the alliances into which they enter. The following relationships were mapped between conditions, related to strategic alliances:

- (a–e) A strong organization has higher credibility to secure support from local governments and to create strong alliances with other actors. These alliances in turn further strengthen Sirua. [credibility as a missing capacity]
- (a–b) Coordinated work with communities will favor the establishment of new strategic alliances
- (a–g) With local government support, newly created ordinances will be responsive to local needs and will support the permanence of the Corridor

– **Regarding the role of communities in the Corridor**

The “systemic analysis of conditions” exercise highlighted the centrality of communities as allies for the conservation of the Corridor, while also affirming that communities have their own understanding and vision for the Corridor. The group that analyzed that condition finished that exercise with an open question: “*Will the community really respond to the expectations that the Foundation and its allies propose, towards protecting the Corridor?*” The following key relationships were identified between conditions related to collaborative community involvement in the Corridor:

- (b–g) Communities + Sirua can be a vital combination in monitoring compliance with ordinances [this idea is directly referenced from the RECC presentation and feedback sessions].
- (b–e) A community convinced of the benefits of the Corridor can become a fundamental piece of the institution responsible for the management of the Corridor, thus making us stronger.

– **Additional relationships were mapped related to community education and willingness to collaborate**

- (b–c) If the community understands the importance of the Corridor coordinated activities that yield mutual benefit will be more likely
- (c–d) A well-informed community convinced of the benefits of the Corridor will support its care and security.
- (e–c) A strong organization will have more capacity to interact with the community and make it understand the importance of the Corridor for the community

5.4.3.2. Change conditions continue to evolve in WS 2 and the conversation shifts to focus on the central role of communities, including as future members of the board of directors

In workshop 2, we (Fabricio and me) again divided the participants into groups (this time mixed: G1—Manuel, Fernando, and Kerstin; G2—Rob, Lenin, and Julio) and asked each group to produce the 3–5 most important conditions necessary for the sustainability of the Corridor. The exercise was the same as the week before, but now in response to a more prioritized set of challenges (we had just finished updating the challenge map presented in **section 5.4.1.**), as well as some new perspectives from the new participants. The groups were free to consult the conditions from WS 1, but were not asked to start from those conditions.

Three significant changes occurred in the process:

- What was previously condition “d” regarding the generation of secure spaces with the support of armed forces and police is now reflected in two new conditions that better reflect the complex reasons behind the Corridor’s challenges, and therefore a shift away from an overt armed security perspective
- New conditions more clearly enunciated the need for active strategic engagement with other actors
- One of the two groups included a focus on the biological functions of the corridor, a theme that had been overlooked thus far

I now briefly share some detail on the first change, to continue with the example. I have included the changed conditions in the table below, along with some interesting reflections that emerged related to these new conditions:

Original from WS 1	New conditions WS 2	Supporting reflections
d) Secure spaces should be generated in which the armed forces (primarily the police and marines) are involved as a Corridor management and sustainability strategy (Sirua field staff)	A zone of relative stability exists in and around the Corridor (Rob, Lenin, and Julio). – <i>For example, conflicts with neighbors are resolved and communities have better means of survival, better quality of life, hope for the future, better organization and increased roles for women</i>	<i>“Thinking back to the large circles with arrows close to the Corridor yesterday, it is obvious that for the Corridor to really be sustainable in the long term these circles need to move back a bit. It is impossible for us to change the social and political situation in all of Esmeraldas or in the northern border, so we need to accept that we are always going to have problems in this inner circle here (referring to the challenges map). What we have to do is create a buffer zone of sorts—a bit different from the traditional conservation understanding of that term; more like a stability zone, so that the surrounding people don’t put so much pressure. What can be done to avoid this? Some of the ideas we have listed here” (Rob) (referring to the examples given below the condition)</i>
	Key actors value the Corridor sufficiently to defend it and support it, each according to their roles and capacities (Rob, Lenin, and Julio). – <i>Key actors include communities, individual neighbors (landholders), local governments, palm companies, the regional MAE representatives (i.e.,</i>	<i>“What we discussed was that the social, economic and institutional context in the Corridor is very complicated, and Sirua is normally quite alone—this came out a lot yesterday. But we need others to also be defending the Corridor and in the last couple of years all the environmental organizations have left, leaving us more alone than ever. So we have listed these key actors as necessary to defend the Corridor. When we say that each actor is willing to defend the Corridor this doesn’t mean all the time. Regarding the armed forces, the conditions from the previous workshop did indeed seem to increase the</i>

Original from WS 1	New conditions WS 2	Supporting reflections
	<i>RECC), and, if possible (and desirable), armed forces.</i>	<i>chances of generating rejection due to their presence. But, we feel that when the chips are down we need to see them as a last line of defense. In a situation like that which prevails in San Lorenzo, if we have to call and they don't respond that could be fatal" (Rob).</i>

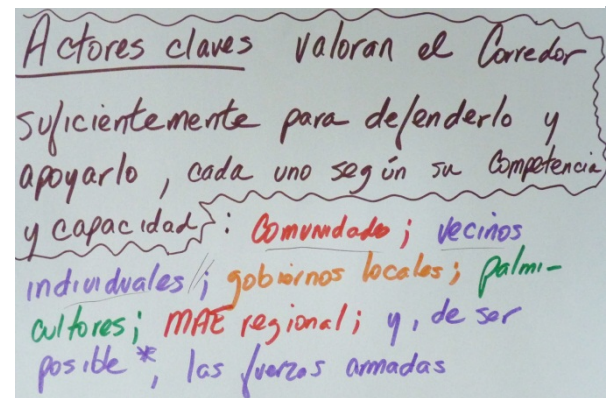
5.4.3.3. Post presentation plenary—conversation shifts to focus on the central role of communities, including as future members of the board of directors

After presenting these conditions, we (Fabricio and me) conducted a plenary to allow for open reflection. In this plenary, significant discussion was dedicated to the condition: “Key actors value the Corridor sufficiently to defend it and support it, each according to their roles and capacities”. After Kerstin suggests strengthening the language of the condition to reflect ownership by key actors, Rob gives an example what this appropriation might look like: *“For example, if the municipal government (due to corruption) begins granting licenses for everyone to enter the Corridor, including invasions, we would hope that the palm company representative be among those that say—‘No, that’s too much, I’m not a conservationist but the Corridor does have a value for us so they can’t do this’. It’s not that we would expect them to become huge advocates for conservation, but at least put certain limits on what is acceptable” (Rob).*

Manuel Valencia then builds on Rob’s example to make an impassioned plea to make community relatively more important than other actors, such as armed forces. He notes that while the Ministry of Environment and other actors may have power in Quito, the communities have the ultimate power to let things happen or not—i.e., security forces have limited power against communities acting together. Thus, if the municipality issues an ordinance allowing free entry into the Corridor, or extending the municipal boundaries to include the Corridor, *“if the community is aware of that they can be mobilized and invalidate the ordinance—keep the local police out. Because you have to have a good reason for entering, and we can’t enter El Dorado or Ventanas; not with the marines nor with the police; and we’ve tried but the community doesn’t let us. So what does this tell us? That the communities have more power than any municipal ordinance..., than any group of squatters. So to strengthen ourselves more we need to unite with each community. The community will defend it (the Corridor) with more intentionality than any municipality, than any police” (Valencia).*

Rob responds by clarifying that indeed his group had intentionally listed communities and close neighbors first in the list (see **Figure 41**), and the others at a second level, “*exactly as you said, there is a priority to that alliance*”. He then makes a connection to Sirua’s governance challenges: “*If governance is about ownership of Corridor issues and these actors are so important, why are they not represented on the board? We know the current board and assembly do not carry out their function, but perhaps we shouldn’t be surprised considering that outside of armed forces none of the actors we note as important are actually represented on the board*” (Rob).

Figure 41—Condition 2: Key actors value the corridor



Later, as we moved into the next exercise, Fernando noted his discomfort with community members participating in the board: “*The only insinuation that I didn’t like personally was the idea that a person from the community would become a member of the board. That could be very dangerous*” (Fernando). This issue comes and goes throughout the remainder of the process, with Rob as its most vocal supporter (see **section 7.3**).

5.5. Analysis and chapter conclusion

The conditions continued to evolve and emerge throughout the process, as we eventually ended up with the following vision and conditions in the final strategic plan:

Vision: <i>The Awacachi Biological Corridor (CBA) is conserved via an effective management system based on ecological, social and cultural values to allow for the development of an enabling environment that achieves a balance between quality of life of communities and the ability of the CBA to sustain itself over time.</i>	A) The corridor maintains, renews and strengthens its ecological, social and cultural values, and therefore, its importance as a local, national, regional and international patrimony
	B) Key actors in formal and informal alliances take ownership in effectively supporting the integrated conservation of the Corridor
	C) A relatively stable environment favors the sustainability of the Corridor
	D) Sirua has organizational structure, capacities and culture that enable effective response to the Corridor’s complex conservation challenges

What I refer to in this chapter as a *maturing* of assumptions is in fact changes in appreciative settings—i.e., changes in patterns of communicative interaction between different participants that reflect learning. The most evident shift is from a self-referential point of view that mostly sees the world from a pure “biological Corridor” perspective to a perspective that begins empathizing with the different appreciative settings of community members, potential allies, and Sirua staff. This shift includes significant debate to consider the changes that would be needed for key actors to value the Corridor sufficiently to defend it and support it, each according to their roles and capacities. Thus, although clear threats exist to the physical integrity of the Corridor, long-term conservation in Sirua’s complex environment is now perceived to require a shift from a *security and protection worldview*, to a perspective that prioritizes ecological, social and cultural valuing of the corridor to leverage external support and resources, alongside the generation of local ownership and good neighbor status with communities. Developing and maintaining relationships with key actors is assumed a more effective (albeit complementary) strategy than focusing on control and enforcement actions.²⁰ A pure biological Corridor worldview is well served by a “security and protection” strategy, whereas that strategy is potentially incompatible, or at least insufficient, for an understanding of the Corridor that includes interacting ecological, social and cultural values.

These change conditions continued to evolve via successive approximations to the issues, including revisiting and improving the conditions and assumptions on three more occasions after workshop 2. None of these exercises repeated a previous exercise, but all reexamined the issues from another angle or for another purpose. Throughout the process, we (participants, led by Fabricio or me) recorded assumptions eventually to arrive at a defensible set of ideas on which the challenges, conditions, and strategies would be based. In workshop 7 (March 2010), for example, I shared with the participants the major assumptions generated thus far in

²⁰ The actual strategic plan includes detailed development of these conditions, including accompanying narrative explanations, assumptions, and indicators.

the process, organized by condition. We then asked each participant to rate which assumptions he or she considered to be: a) the most or least true, b) closest or furthest from each person's personal beliefs, and c) most important for substantiating the particular condition. From the ratings, we could see less-substantiated ideas falling off, stronger ideas being validated, and other ideas being improved.

Redundant methodology appears to promote organizational learning by introducing new layers of knowledge as participants enable and constrain each other in reflective conversation, initiated by different methods that favor the sharing of experience and the contrast of different perspectives. The examples draw out new layers of complexity as contrasting ideas solicit detailed "corrective" examples in some cases (e.g., Fernando's mining and hunting examples), or as different participants register conflicting ideas in other cases. For example, the reality of communities is continually reinforced as participants explicitly recognize that they are highly affected by survival needs and the region's broader dynamics. This conversation has been present from the first workshop, but has continually matured and become nuanced to reflect real life complexities. These considerations are later offered as a condition postulating that *an enabling environment must consist of in part the resolution of conflicts with neighbors and "communities having better means of survival, quality of life, hope for the future, better organization and increased roles for women"*, which is a clear expansion of the concept "biological corridor."

In the following chapter, I return to the PDTG case to provide another example of how capacity emerges as shifts in patterns of communicative interaction, and how methodology—in this case Soft Systems Methodology—supports these emergent shifts.

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6. Capacity emerges as shifts in patterns of communicative interaction—PDTG case

Chapter formatting key

Voice	Formatting
Alfredo as narrator of empirical data	Text in regular Times New Roman font
Alfredo as interpreter and analyst	Verdana font and either under a sub-heading called “analysis” or in a single-cell table.
Participant voices	“ <i>Double quotation marks and italics</i> ” When included in my analysis, they are also in Verdana font.

6.1. Introduction and chapter focus

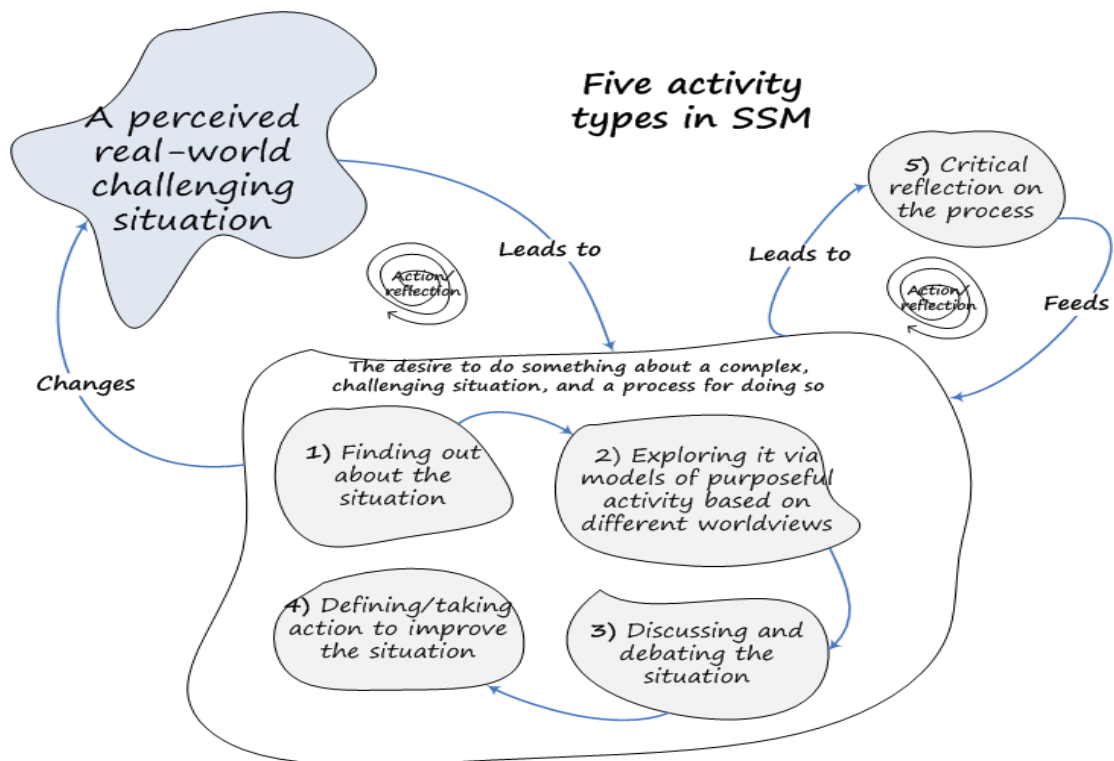
In this chapter, I return to the PDTG action-research process, whose overall focus was to help PDTG develop a shared organizational identity via the identification, recognition and valuing of individual and collective capacities and challenges. The purpose of the specific “Cluny” workshop (April 2010, nine months into the action-research) that this chapter draws from was to develop an organizational theory of change that would help clarify the boundaries between PDTG’s identity as a dynamic political collective versus a more structured social change organization (understood by some as an NGO) that implements projects.

Methodologically, I explore:

- How the use of sociodrama and relational systemic “theories of change” drawings as a hybrid of SSM reveals complex behaviors and motivations between PDTG work teams and their primary stakeholders, which leads to significant organizational introspection and learning on:
 - The viability of both supporting on-the-ground work of organizations in social movements *and* generating academic critical theory based on their struggles; and
 - The need to challenge social movement actors that do not respect diverse ways of knowing and acting in the world.
- How the issues emerge and evolve as people enable and constrain different ideas and interpretations of reality. Significant communication shifts eventually become codified in team-level theories of change.
- How soft systems methods serve as a conversation “accelerator” that allows the group to enter more deeply into the flow of organizational complexity.

The same learning theory presented in **section 5.2.** is pertinent to this chapter. In the remainder of this chapter, I share how elements of complex organizational identity emerge, are challenged, are reinforced (i.e., validated), and in some cases, shifted through communicative interaction in a SSM Mode 2 exercise (see **section 2.2.3.2.** for an explanation of SSM mode 2). Evidence of these shifts is found in the patterned narratives from two important methodological workshop moments: sociodramas and theories of change developed by programmatic area (also referred to as teams). I explain these exercises within the logic of the SSM activity types 1–5 (presented in **Figure 4** in **Chapter 2**, reproduced here as **Figure 42**).

Figure 42—SSM activity types (adapted from Checkland and Poulter, 2006: 62)



6.2. The intentional use of hybrid (Mode 2) SSM thinking with PDTG effectively draws out complexity, exposing important enabling-constraints, and enriches analysis and learning by bringing diverse perspectives into focus

6.2.1. *Finding out about the situation (SSM activity type 1)—Sociodramas depicting organizational relevance*

6.2.1.1. SSM activity type 1

In SSM, “finding out about the situation” refers to a process intended to approach a real life challenge from a systemic mindset that acknowledges the complex, messy nature of the situation (i.e. multiple actors and factors) and the existence of multiple understandings of the situation. It implies diving in and grappling with the complexity of the situation to begin to orient the users to whatever salient characteristics are appreciable as the overall inquiry process begins. “Finding out” is intended to help users understand ‘the main entities, structures and viewpoints in the situation, the processes going on, the current recognized issues and any potential ones’ (Checkland and Poulter, 2010: 210). This can include any activity intended to assemble knowledge of a situation, including talking to people, conducting more formal interviews, attending meetings, reading documents, etc. (Checkland and Poulter 2010: 209). At a certain point, it is helpful to try to make sense out of the information being generated, but in a way in which important elements of the complexity of situation are not lost. To do so, SSM offers four techniques for mapping and analyzing the problematic situation: 1) Drawing rich pictures, 2) Analysis of actors and issues, 3) Culture analysis, and 4) Power analysis. Items 2–4 are also known as analysis 1, 2 and 3.

The main “finding out” technique I share in this section is a sociodrama that will be presented shortly. However, we (Juan Carlos and me) conducted many more finding out processes as well, including pre-workshop meetings and a presentation by PDTG director Marco of the draft strategic plan to provide an “official” perspective on organizational strategic intentions at that moment. As part of the sociodrama exercise itself, we conducted several pre-finding out exercises, as described in the methodology below.

6.2.1.2. Methodology

The sociodrama (i.e., skit) exercise occurred in several moments over one afternoon and the following morning and included preparation, feedback, and reflection activities. Our intention was to generate creative tension between the programmatic offerings of each PDTG team, and

the expectations and perceived value of those offerings by the intended primary stakeholders. This would generate assumptions about the relevance of PDTG's programs to be used in developing theories of change later in the workshop. In the absence of the actual primary stakeholders, we (Juan Carlos and me) generated a simulation that would at least attempt to shake out some differences between stakeholder motivations/expectations and PDTG programmatic intentions, as perceived by PDTG members. The following methodological details are important for understanding the exercise:

- Each team first conducted a critical introspection exercise regarding its programmatic relevance with its target stakeholders. This built on an exercise done a month earlier in another workshop (Playa Arica) in which each team had developed analysis exploring: “Who are we?; What do we do?; and, What do we want as a team?” In reference to this last question, Juan Carlos and I asked them to answer “*why is what you want important, and to whom is it important?*” We also asked each team to generate questions regarding their programmatic offerings that they might ask of their target stakeholders if they had been present in this moment.
- Each team was to design its sociodrama to show how the work it does is important, as well as to show “*what are the behaviors and motivations (visible or hidden) of the people involved in this work (i.e., “them” and “us”)*”.
- Feedback was generated in conversational plenary sessions, enhanced by comments and questions registered at various moments on post-it notes.

The actors

The following people participated in the two workshop moments

Tejiendo Saberes ('Weaving Knowledges')

Marco (director), Carlos (publications coordinator), Silvia (publications marketing and distribution), Paula (board president)

Ñoqanchiq ('We, together')

Ana (programmatic lead), Patricio (OD facilitator), Katy (same)

Comunicación Alternativa (Alternative communication)

Nancy (professional communicator), Pablo (same)

I now present two of the three sociodramas (Tejiendo Saberes and Ñoqanchiq) derived from transcriptions, but edited and paraphrased for clarity and flow. I have not included the “Comunicación Alternativa” sociodrama due to space limitations.

6.2.1.3. Sociodramas

- **Team Tejiendo Saberes (TS)**

TS was represented by Marco, playing himself as Director of PDTG, and Ricardo playing Jorge, a professor from a community in the Andean highlands.

Act 1: Marco introduces himself to Jorge, who expresses that his community's conflict with a mining company needs to be made more visible to the local and regional governments, as well as "the folks in Lima". Jorge explains that his community organization wishes to carry out a neighborhood consultative process throughout the Province to convince others to support a provincial referendum to stop the mining project. He also would like to conduct workshops with local authorities to generate their support for the referendum. He asks Marco if PDTG has experience in these areas.

Marco begins by mentioning PDTG's positive relationship with CONACAMI (The National Confederation of Peruvian Communities Affected by Mining) and notes that PDTG is an organization that carries out projects, but which is also committed to working with social organizations "on the ground". He proposes that PDTG help in two ways (turns out to be more). First, they would organize key activists in Lima to present the issues and generate feedback. He could also give some copies of the PDTG-published cartoon booklet "Of course, the Territory is Ours" to distribute at the community level. He suggests that it would be interesting to conduct a joint systematization process to better document and interpret the conflict with Jorge's community, because that could produce relevant knowledge for other struggles as well. Lastly, he offers to accompany Jorge's organization over the following months, participate in the protests, and carry out training workshops. From there, they could decide what to do next.

Act 2: Marco and Ricardo are marching in a protest yelling "Agriculture yes, mining no, agriculture yes, mining no, referendum now!" Suddenly, Marco yells that the police are coming to put down the protest, at which point they quickly disperse and then run off the scene.

Act 3: Marco once again comes across Professor Jorge and updates him that PDTG has documented and communicated everything that has transpired, as well as initiated

trainings through PDTG's Ñoqanchiq team. He asks how everything has gone since the protest, which he heard had resulted in his (Jorge's) temporary imprisonment and torture. Jorge shares that after all the effort, they have won approval for the anti-mining referendum and he thanks Marco for his support. He requests further support for the referendum in the form of video documentation, training and a publication as an input to the training. The publication should help identify theoretical arguments to support a rejection of mining, and include testimonies of teachers, mayors, parents, rural women, and others that are part of this struggle.

Act 4: After some time, Marco again meets with Jorge, and as he says hello, he hands him a draft copy of the publication and highlights how the book comes with a PPT presentation with maps and photos to share in the forthcoming public forum. "It is a practical book", he insists, with interviews and pictures that accurately represent everything that has transpired, and asks if it could be presented in the public forum. The skit ends with both saying: "On to the assembly then!"

- **Team Ñoqanchiq**

Patricio, Ana, Katy, and Nancy participated in this skit, with the audience involved as well. Patricio begins by briefly explaining that the primary mission of Ñoqanchiq is accompaniment of organizations that work in social movements, including CONACAMI, different women's and indigenous rights organizations, and various popular education, critical art and alternative communications organizations. The sociodrama occurs in a single act, with Katy facilitating a workshop on behalf of PDTG to define the characteristics of the ideal female leader with members of a women's organization.

Act 1: With participants seated on the ground, Katy asks for a volunteer to stand next to her so that the participants can stick the characteristics of an ideal leader directly onto the volunteer's body—wherever they most make sense. "Patricia" volunteers and the participants begin to write and arrange ideas on her body (see **Figure 43**). "Fair," placed on her heart; "Strong, to combat the oppressors," also on her heart; another "strong," placed on her shoulder "so that she packs a punch!"; "Solidarity, with her fellow companions and other social movements," placed on her hand.

Figure 43—Ñoqanchiq sociodrama



Suddenly Juana, the organization’s leader, gets up and excuses herself, and announces she has to attend to the food because it is not properly organized. Katy reminds her that this is *her* process and that she should be participating, but Juana simply states she is confident with the facilitators’ abilities and to please continue without her until she returns in an hour and a half. Juana leaves and Katy asks the participants what should be done—continue, suspend, wait?—, stating it is *their* responsibility to decide. In the conversation that ensues, one person suggests that the facilitators decide, another that Juana be removed of her leadership duties, and yet another that the group deal with it more responsibly—as a bump in the road in an ongoing process. One participant, ignoring it all, stands up and places the word “lucid” on Patricia’s face: “That she be able to speak well—decisive and strong— like Juana!”

Juana returns stating she was able to get everything in order and Katy immediately confronts and informs her that they have had a long discussion about her inopportune exit, to which Juana responds: “Thank you for bringing this up, which is very good timing because I would like to share a few thoughts of my own on the matter”. She proceeds to scold the women participants who were on the meal planning committee for not doing *their* job properly in the first place. She acknowledges that she should be participating in the workshop—this, in spite of her vast experience—but explains that when the other “compañeras” do not do their job, she is forced into this difficult

situation. She thanks PDTG for facilitating spaces like these to talk about things that normally are not discussed, or are discussed very superficially in big assemblies. Katy concludes by suggesting a future workshop to develop strategies to put the identified attributes to practice. Applause...

Discussion of key themes as they relate to organizational identity

Alfredo: Please note that this discussion is assembled solely from participant comments and does not include researcher analysis except where indicated in Verdana font. All phrases were either registered by participants on cards, flip charts or post-its, or were taken from the moments in which they were recorded presenting. Facilitators did not participate in these exercises beyond methodological facilitation.

- **Academic theory and social movement practice—Is Tejiendo Saberes attempting to connect unbridgeable worlds?**

In the initial round of activity in preparation of the sociodramas, the internal dialogue within TS revealed an unresolved tension regarding the usefulness of the theory generated by TS to key actors in social movements. On the one hand, the TS team substantiated its programmatic offering ‘*Research with, from and for social movements*’ as being relevant because it makes visible potential development alternatives present in the actions, theories, and proposals of social movements. “*We assume this is relevant to ourselves, the women’s and campesino movements, and the sexual diversity movements*” (TS team). In addition, for its publications programmatic offering (e.g., books on community and social movement resistance to mining, indigenous rights, etc.) the TS team offered the following substantiation:

We think it is important to develop and distribute products that document social conflicts and resistances, to provide a visible memory of these events and help us learn from them in relation to broader contexts. The book Mining and Territory, for example, captured voices and visions from the front lines (i.e. from indigenous leaders, researchers, militants) and contributed to broader theoretical/academic debates. We think this is primarily relevant to CONACAMI.

However, in the second part of the exercise, they formulated questions to CONACAMI and other actors in social movements that put those same offerings in doubt, as well as raised doubts about the usefulness of progressive academics to the on-the-ground work of social movements:

- To what extent do our research publications and seminars provoke discussion and strengthening in your movement?

- To what extent does our research question Eurocentric hegemony on critical theory and generate paradigms and theories based on alternative realities in Perú?
- Do you see PDTG's publications and seminars as different from the hegemonic academia? How, why?
- What research methodologies and languages are appropriate between academia and social movements?
- How do international networks of progressive researchers and activists contribute to resistances in Perú?

This questioning goes deeper in a post-sociodrama plenary session when Patricio asks if the theoretical dispute is only about content, or if it is also about the *ways* in which knowledge is produced. In that same conversation, Nancy insists that knowledge production with actors in social movements should not only serve to generate better knowledge to support external theoretical disputes, but to help better understand local realities and needs. These reflections are further supported by questions registered on post-its towards the end of the exercise: *“How can we make theories and texts that are more accessible to social movements and not only to academia? Does the theoretical dispute include the ways knowledge is produced?; Is theory different from knowledges? Shouldn't epistemological alternatives open new horizons and challenge the existing dominant ways of doing things?”*

Alfredo: Through the questions and conversations, participants are actively constraining the field of possibility, challenging the very legitimacy of “weaving knowledges”—a bridge between critical theory and social movement practices—as a concept. This includes “self-challenges” from the TS team as they critically introspect on their relevance by asking questions to their stakeholders (as an exercise). Patricio and others are openly asking if perhaps TS is trying to join concepts that *can* be bridged (i.e., theory and practice) with *forms* of production that may be incompatible—i.e., theoretical construction *about* social movements generated through hegemonic academic rules and practice that yield information unusable or irrelevant to actors in social movements.

In response, the TS team uses the sociodrama to legitimate a bridge between these different worlds by making its publications more practical

and useful for the community organization. Marco offers a colloquial publication (the cartoon booklet), and when he meets Jorge in a later scene, he presents him with a “practical” didactic publication and PPT, with maps and pictures to present in the assembly, relevant to the local situation. Marco is in essence responding to the very questions regarding programmatic relevance posed pre and post-skit. TS’s incorporation of these new strategies in the sociodrama reflects a change in the patterns of their internal team-level conversations, and shows their belief that these bridges are possible and feasible—even to the extent of communities in the future desiring “the *theoretical* arguments to support our rejection of mining!”

- **Ñoqanchiq—in search of new methodology and capacities for strengthening political actors in complex situations**

In the pre-sociodrama preparations the Ñoqanchiq team developed critical questions and some hypothetical answers (*in italics*) to ask of their primary stakeholders to guide their analysis on the relevance of their programmatic offering:

- What changes are needed for you to be able to strengthen your leadership and your work with communities?
- What do we think they understand about what we do... and why do they wish to be strengthened (a question to themselves as a team)? “*We think that for some the motivation for participating in this process is that it brings international recognition.*”
- How have the dialogues we have sponsored with the women’s movements generated impacts in the women’s organizations and in individual women’s lives? “*We think it has helped us get to know the women and their resistances better, as well as generate less negative perspectives about feminists from within the women’s movements. But after the dialogues, what?*”

Alfredo: The questions Ñoqanchiq ask of themselves reveal that they are barely forming their identity as a team; subsequent post-it notes and plenary reflections confirm this: “*What do these organizations really want from PDTG? Do we understand the organizational and structural dynamics of these movements? How do we manage power relationships with organizational leaders? How do concepts, such as training, strengthening*

and accompaniment, connect to transformation? How do we make accompaniment a daily practice and what rate of change do we expect to support through accompaniment?"

The main elements that emerge from the questioning and the subsequent conversations can be summarized in two main items. First, significant questioning is leveled regarding the real motivations and interests of the social organizations with which PDTG works. The question *"do we really know what these organizations want, including their hidden agendas?"*, captures this issue well. This leads to a litany of additional examples of half-hearted participation of primary stakeholders in PDTG-facilitated processes, including those facilitated by TS. Various hypotheses are then offered for the inadequate participation:

- Lack of commitment because they are used to instrumental relationships with NGOs?
- Lack of capacity to carry forward their own processes?
- An intentional and smart outsourcing to experts for things outside organizational expertise?
- PDTG intentionally reserving certain roles for itself through paternalistic behaviors?

Lastly, they discuss being at a loss for methodology that helps them generate a culture of accompaniment, construct democratic, collaborative and equitable relationships, and generate changes in the political culture of these organizations to include questioning *their own basic understanding of concepts such as accompaniment and systematization*. *"What capacities do we have as a team"* becomes an important discussion point.

6.2.1.4. Analysis

Identity implications—PDTG's hybrid "bridging" identity is in question

In the Ñoqanchiq sociodrama, knowledge is being generated in a workshop for the practical purposes of improving organizational leadership. In other moments, team members speak of the importance of systematization of

experiences, but again, for practical purposes of strengthening capacities and generating useful local knowledge, and not to generate theory per se. The TS team, on the other hand, is very intentionally trying to generate a bridge between critical theory and social movement practices. However, various participants, including members of TS, generate push back on this concept through the sociodrama exercise, with some participants, such as Ana, making very direct challenges: *"Are we a connection (i.e., bridge) or are we militants, or are we who we are and that is developed along the way and has various sources? This area of our identity needs a lot of reflection"* (Ana). These push backs include: a) challenging the idea that locally generated knowledge should be generated primarily for use in theoretical debates elsewhere; rather, that it should be used to support local sense-making processes; b) challenging the idea that externally generated knowledge can even be useful in specific local struggles—in content and form; and c) challenging the idea that progressive academics have the epistemological tools, worldviews, and dispositions to co-generate local knowledge in ways that honor diverse local knowledge and worldviews. These dilemmas remain unresolved even as the TS sociodrama conceptually resolves some of the issues being challenged by offering practical products that include theoretical arguments.

On a smaller scale, Ñoqanchiq's identity is also in question as—after reflecting on Juana's resistance—they enunciate their frustrations and fears about the motivations of the organizations they accompany, the complexity of the changes they are trying to support, and about their own need for better methodology and team-level capacities. At one moment, this leads to a clarification by Patricio that *"we don't only want to serve the social movements from their perspective, but should look at them more critically"*. This same notion had been mentioned earlier by Marco, and is now further developed by Nancy: *"We need to be more precise here because not every social movement is a transformational entity. For example, some of these movements put forth the Andean indigenous theme as an ideal for society... But it is one thing to recover cultural practices and quite another to base*

your action on regressive ideas that are sexist and hierarchical, and that deep down also have a racial undercurrent that rejects diversity. Some of our friends in the indigenous movements consider diversity to be an aberration; They are movements that do not accept change—they don't accept it!" Nancy suggests that PDTG should only support movements that actually have emancipatory causes and embrace diversity as a core value. We will see that this shift in conversation subsequently becomes a core element in Ñoqanchiq's identity as expressed in its theory of change.

6.2.2. *Exploring and debating the situation with the aid of “systems” models based on different worldviews (SSM activity types 2 and 3)—Development of “systemic” theories of change*

6.2.2.1. SSM activity types 2 and 3

In SSM, major activities are identified that, if linked together in a coherent manner in a “system of human activity”, would be relevant to the types of transformations (i.e., changes, improvements) sought in a given problematic situation. These linked activities, if implemented, would generate transformations that would be meaningful to those represented by the philosophy or “worldview” behind the system. The idea is to identify different worldviews that would be relevant in a particular situation (e.g., the Olympic Games from the perspective of the host city, or from the perspective of the athletes, or the home television viewer), and then model systems of activity to generate relevant questions of the real life situation from those perspectives (Checkland and Poulter 2010: 219). Since each system model is built according to a specific worldview, they are not meant to describe reality or to find the “right answer” on how to approach a problematic situation. Instead, they offer different lenses with which to look at complex realities, and provide a source of good questions to ask of that reality. Knowledge from these different perspectives can then be used to enrich analysis of a situation from multiple perspectives.

In our case, the theory of change diagrams, including relationships between conditions in those diagrams, offer an elaborate presentation of worldview (see **Figure 45, top figure**). The very purpose of a theory of change is to map *how we think change occurs in the world* (delimited to particular areas of concern), and this will be evident in the examples. Then, in accompanying mind maps (see **Figure 45, bottom figure**), we (participants, facilitated by Juan Carlos and me) built a hybrid version of “systems models of purposeful activity” by listing the most important

activities implied by the theory of change. This also includes a deep analysis of the implications of those interventions on the capacities and relationships with other actors that each team would need to have or develop.

For SSM activity type 3—discussing and debating the situation—very little methodological guidance is given (same for activity type 4). Instead, emphasis is placed on using the human activity system models (from activity type 2) as a source of questions to ask of the situation. Checkland suggests that whatever the process used, it remains light-footed and not get bogged down in mechanical comparisons of models, but instead generates lively emotional responses—emotion being ‘for most people a powerful trigger for significant learning to occur’ (Checkland and Poulter 2010: 227). Significant differences in worldview always provoke feelings, not simply mental activity, but the facilitated process should help bring out questions that are likely to generate attention, excitement, or emotion (Checkland and Poulter 2010: 227). Regardless of the process used, the overall aim is to generate deep discussion and reflection so that a richer appreciation of the situation is generated. This lays the groundwork for helping different people with different worldviews to find ways to improve the real situation, in ways with which they can all live (Checkland and Poulter 2010: 229).

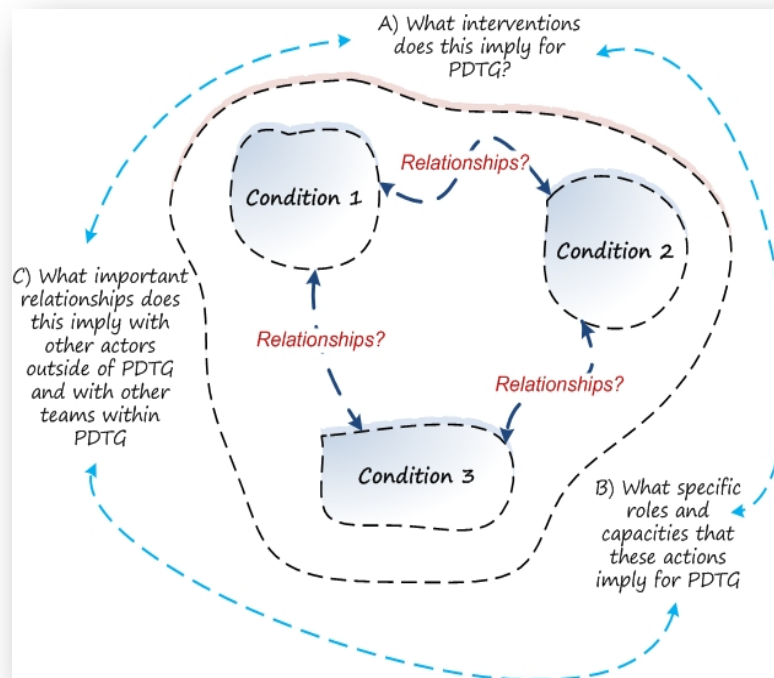
6.2.2.2. Methodology

This exercise was meant to produce conceptual justifications in the form of “conditions” needed for change (and underlying assumptions) and then to generate dialogue between those justifications and desired organizational action. Each team identified a core idea that reflected the types of transformations they are trying to support, the 3–5 most important conditions that would need to exist for these types of transformations to be possible, and the most important conceptual relationships that exist between the conditions. Relationships between conditions, just as with Sirua, were simply considered assumptions—assumptions defined as anything we think is “true” about a situation. The idea of conditions and relationships is presented in the inner circle of **Figure 44**, which contains three conditions and dotted arrows between them (dotted to denote that they are conceptual, not linear relationships). Each team then developed a mind map that figuratively placed the entire conditions diagram in the middle of the map and conducted the following analyses on the branches:

- a) The most important types of interventions that this analysis implies for PDTG
- b) The specific roles and capacities that these actions imply for PDTG
- c) The most important relationships that this implies with other actors outside of PDTG and with other teams within PDTG.

These three areas of focus are posed as questions on the outside of the inner circle of **Figure 44**.

Figure 44—Systemic theories of change activity model



I now share how these STOC diagrams (and exercise overall) were used as SSM “epistemological devices”, not meant to describe reality but to generate debate from different perspectives as a basis for action (Checkland, 2000: S52). Then, in the analysis, I unpack how this hybrid “Mode 2” application of SSM helped accentuate communicative interaction in ways that go beyond everyday conversation.

Alfredo: Note that in the discussion below, all the narrative is taken from information produced by each team, including related commentary. I have joined some of the ideas that were on cards into a narrative form for presentational purposes, and because the narrative appropriately joins ideas that might otherwise seem disjointed.

6.2.2.3. Discussion of key themes as they relate to organizational identity

- **Ñoqanchiq takes a pro-diversity stance in its theory of change**

The Ñoqanchiq team generated four conditions and a purpose statement that expressed their intention to critically question the internal practices of key organizations that support social movements. The following condition expresses this desire the most clearly: *“Organizations [in social movements] recognize and accept how the same systems of domination, exclusion, exploitation and discrimination they are struggling against exist within their organizations, and take this into account in their proposals for change”*. This condition is meant to support the emergence of *“a truly democratic organizational and political culture which questions, proposes and practices alternatives to authoritative, patriarchal, colonial, racist, sexist, capitalist, fundamentalist systems that promote hegemonic ways of thinking, exploitation and the destruction of nature”*.

Alfredo: In other words, Ñoqanchiq believes broader transformations occur when key actors and organizations in social movements first reform from within, which includes recognizing dominant population-wide patterns of behavior that they enact through their communicative activity. Only by doing so can they serve as real alternatives and not simply reproduce hegemonic ways of thinking and acting.

This condition has important methodological implications that team Ñoqanchiq then proposes as interventions. Transformation from within will require a new level of “concentización” or self-awareness, which allows for new worldviews that favor diversity—including tolerance of other social movements—to emerge. Deeper self-awareness can best be supported through practices of reflection in action that allow people to introspect and explore their beliefs and fears at a deeper level, which leads to Ñoqanchiq interventions focused on: 1) *“critical accompaniment—i.e., using reflexive methodologies to strengthen capacities while challenging dominant ways of thinking,”* and 2) *“facilitation of dialogue between organizations and other change agents from different movements to challenge prejudices and develop common ground”*. This will require political and methodological capacities that allow Ñoqanchiq to open sensibilities and generate empathy through accompaniment, now defined as: *“co-facilitation of transformational processes with organizations in social movements, including within PDTG”*.

- **Tejiendo Saberes constructs an intentional bridge between theory and practice, in content and form**

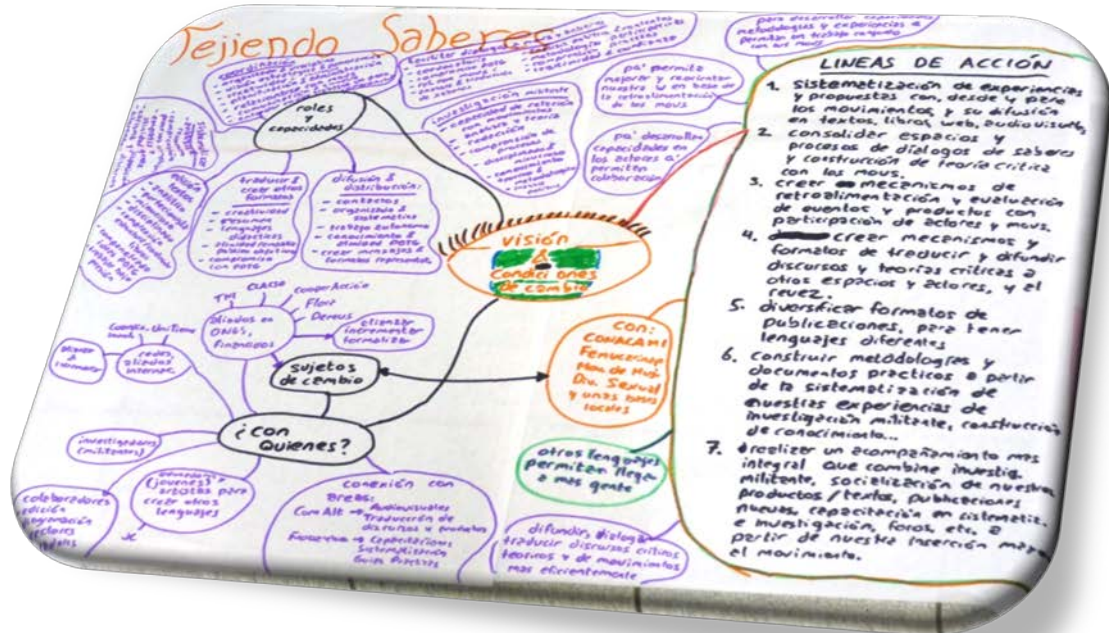
TS developed conditions that emphasized how social movements can generate development alternatives. The theory of change can be summarized as follows (see **Figure 45** for TS theory of change diagram):

Alfredo: Note, I have summarized the basic theory of change directly from the information produced by the TS, and have not added any ideas unless indicated by Verdana font. The ideas are represented in **Figure 45**, in addition to transcripts of their presentation of their emerging theory of change:

A socially (including gender, sexual and intercultural), economically and environmentally just world is only possible through “real” bottom-up democracy in diverse, decolonized nations. This extends to the international “system”, which must also be radically democratized through pressure from progressive social movements around the world that are the main protagonists in its transformation. Through their resistances they generate alternative knowledges, political proposals, autonomous spaces, and social relations that inspire and forge a new democratic world, including the belief that alternatives are possible and desirable.

New awareness and alternative practice depends on the availability of spaces and processes that generate feedback, systemic analysis, and theory from social struggles. However, awareness is also needed within movements and in the general population that the transformation of power relations is a complex and multi-dimensional affair—thereby requiring ongoing, political, cultural, and epistemological resistance. This can be supported by critical researchers and educators who construct discourses, analyses, and proposals for change.

Key actors in social movements not only provide examples of development alternatives—documented by others—but must also have the capacity to convert their own knowledges and discourse into viable political proposals that influence society and political systems.



The team developed these ideas further as relationships between conditions, including highlighting the importance of “the state” as an important battleground, and the need to generate dialogical spaces for sharing struggles and knowledge to support a deeper understanding of power relations and the ability to construct proposals from discourses.

According to the TS team, this theory of change will require interventions that:

- Diversify the formats of PDTG publications, using language more accessible to more people. At the same time, create methodological mechanisms and formats to help translate local experiences into useable knowledge for those actors and other actors and experiences
- Carry out a more holistic accompaniment process that includes militant research, the sharing of research products, and training in systematization and research
- Systematize experience, theorize, and generate proposals *with, from and for* social movements to help “*develop methodological capacities, more trust in our ongoing work with organizations, and improve our own worldviews as we are exposed to local perspectives*”

According to the TS team, these interventions require the capacity within PDTG for facilitating dialogue between key actors in different movements, the capacity to construct knowledge with local actors, and the ability to work with new—more accessible and practical—formats and ways of expressing concepts and language.

- **Feedback on the theories of change, including individual reflections and positioning**

After each team presented, Juan Carlos and I asked all participants to use different colored post-it notes to identify the areas of each theory of change that she or he most or least identified with personally, and to register any other questions or comments. Participants requested clarification of TS on whether the methodologies for constructing knowledge “from below” referred primarily to Ñoqanchiq’s work or to other areas as well. Another participant asked, “*what **are** the techniques, languages and strategies needed to reach these groups?*” echoing the skepticism expressed earlier regarding forms of knowledge production. Ana, Patricio, and Paula personally identified with the TS idea that social movements produce experiences and strategies that generate cultural and political resistance. For Patricio, this “*reaffirms my conviction to dispute and construct alternatives to knowledge production processes—for a democratic academy and research practices that are less dogmatic and less instrumental*”. Paula adds that this permits multiple expressions of knowledge that contribute to critical theory. However, Katy

expresses skepticism by stating that the idea of generating critical theory is mere discourse because of the challenges of doing so in a way actually meaningful to local actors.

Individual reactions to Ñoqanchiq's theory of change focused more on questioning the motivations behind the team's strengthening agenda, methodological quandaries, and assumptions, e.g.,: *"How do we deal with 'systems of domination' at personal and societal levels when we're working with organizations? With what strategies?"* And, *"You assume that democratic organizations are more effective—is that really true?"*

6.2.3. Analysis

SSM and changes in patterns of communicative interaction—identity again emerges in ongoing reflective communication

To what extent was PDTG's hybrid identity clarified or strengthened through this process and how did SSM contribute? Each team heavily challenged their own and each other's programmatic ideas in the sociodrama exercise, and then better substantiated their own area. In the theory of change exercise, TS essentially conducts a conceptual overhaul that responds to most of the questioning expressed in the sociodrama exercise. This includes developing interventions that cross team-level boundaries with Ñoqanchiq (systematization), and blur the line between theoretical production and on-the-ground strengthening. Indeed, the TS theory of change is inclusive of the Ñoqanchiq theory of change in that it shifts to make its main source of co-constructed theory the on-the-ground actions that are normally the domain of Ñoqanchiq's strengthening work.

Ñoqanchiq, on the other hand, made an identity shift towards politicizing their work and clarifying their overt change agenda as a team. It is now clear that Ñoqanchiq sees strengthening as intended to help organizations respond to their leadership challenges as the organizations perceive them, as well as to challenge unjust, anti-diversity and inequitable worldviews and practices *as Ñoqanchiq sees them*.

Both teams clearly express a critical militant agenda and both generate conceptual justifications for the need for radical epistemology—including the need to discover new methodologies to support their complex work. However, while Ñoqanchiq's theory of change positions the team as an insider social organization that is part of the specific social movements in which they participate, TS still sees themselves as an insider/outsider bridge between local resistances and more global social movements, including with critical academia. This belief would position TS to use critical theory to affect the "standards of fact or value" that condition the problematic worldviews and practices (appreciative settings) of key actors in social movements—i.e., the appreciative settings of actors Ñoqanchiq wishes to challenge. While the TS theory of change is inclusive, Ñoqanchiq's theory of change does not include this bridging function, and only favors knowledge generated to be useful to key actors in social movements. Notwithstanding, the intentions behind the two theories of change are more explicit and complementary, and thus, generate more clarity of identity at an overall organizational level.²¹

I believe clarification of organizational identity occurred because the exercises used allowed participants to dive deep into existing organizational conversations in which their interests, motivations, and frustrations were close to the surface (Shaw 2002: 39). The subject of the conversations was already relevant and the exercises perhaps provided an accelerator or a 'deep-dive' into those already 'warm issues,' including literally building on results from a workshop a month earlier. Then, in long sessions of reflective interaction, participants were able to express positions, receive feedback, and adapt (or not) their positions, without any of this positioning having been an explicit part of the exercise. In these interactions, enabling-constraints emerged in conversation that validated some ideas, challenged others, and dynamically introduced new ideas in an iterative process. Although we do not know if the patterns will return to their old form, or if

²¹ The Alternative Communication theory of change (not presented here), on the other hand, was heavily confronted by the participants, and AC was later dissolved as a team.

they will inspire some of the actual behavior changes implicit in the theories of change, we did see evidence of the ‘disturbance of repetitive patterns that allows new ones to emerge’ (Shaw 2002: 34), albeit in the microcosm of a workshop.

The hybrid use of SSM is particularly effective in drawing out complexity, exposing important enabling-constraints, and enriching analysis by bringing diverse perspectives into focus

In both the sociodrama and theories of changes exercises, we (Juan Carlos and me) used methodology to draw (figuratively) a complex picture of a situation in which each team carries out its programmatic work. Participants then developed simple maps of “change” conditions and conceptual (non-linear) relationships between those conditions, and used the diagrams to generate a structured debate on worldviews and assumptions on change. These maps of conditions, just as Checkland’s systems drawings, are epistemological, not ontological in their intentionality—i.e., they are intended to ask better questions of complex situations, not describe reality. In Shaw’s language, they are props in the drama (Shaw, 2002: 28) and not the drama itself. These epistemological devices were used to generate contrasting or additional perspectives that supported perhaps a more intensive interaction than that which might occur in other “everyday” conversations as advocated by Stacey and Shaw. For example:

- The finding out process helped clarify many issues and cultural elements present in the situation (e.g., “strongman” leader traits of Juana, Ñoqanchiq workshop culture, and TS overly “busy” activism), and power relationships, including an interesting two-way tacit negotiation of the commodity of power “legitimacy” in the Ñoqanchiq sociodrama.
- The contrast between primary stakeholder expectations and actual PDTG offerings generated internal team introspection and sharp exchanges on programmatic relevance, particularly from Ñoqanchiq to TS.
- The surfacing (theory of change exercise) of differences in worldview between TS and Ñoqanchiq provides new insights into the issues they

“own” and how they see the scope of each team differently. In their theory of change, TS strongly expresses the need for democratic change to come from below in social movement, but in a manner that generates knowledge of development alternatives and converts that knowledge into viable political proposals that generate influence not only through social pressure but public policy. Ñoqanchiq, on the other hand, emphatically expresses the belief that social change occurs when actors introspectively reform from within so that they may be conscious to not reproduce unjust and inequitable population-wide patterns of behavior that exist in broader society. These distinct, albeit complementary, programmatic worldviews were at the heart of the intense dialogue that ensued.

- Intentional structured dialogue based on different models (SSM activity type 3) aided by post-it notes, generated rich communicative interaction. After each team presented their theory of change and mind maps, each participant was asked to write on orange post-it notes questions concerning any part of any team’s analysis, including its own. On pink post-it notes, each participant was asked to write down the ideas that each most or least identified with in any of the analyses (indicating why), and to place all post-it notes wherever they corresponded on the maps (see **Figure 46**). This “structured” analysis permitted deep levels of questioning that exposed enabling-constraints in sharp exchanges, but without losing control as in the debate exercise shared in **Chapter 4**.

Figure 46—Patricio places post it note on other team's work



As a final note, we (all participants) used our analyses to take several actions (SSM activity type 4), including:

- Meet with PDTG board director Paula to discuss next steps for moving major PDTG processes forward, which led to steps for finalizing the strategic plan to include incorporating new knowledge generated in the Cluny workshops.
- Begin developing a management “system” to implement the strategic plan.
- Develop a document that represents PDTGs theories of change in more detail than that which was described in the strategic plan.
- Drill down to specific organizational sub-systems to explore implications of the organization’s new thinking on specific operational areas.
- Utilize some of the methodology utilized in the Cluny workshops to design and facilitate the upcoming event “Dialogue of Knowledges between Social Movements”

Each of these actions was carried out to some level, but the details are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

6.3. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shared how the use of Soft Systems methods served as a conversation “accelerator” that brought enabling-constraints into deeper contrast than everyday communicative interaction, and allowed participants to enter more deeply into the complex flow of organizational complexity. Specifically, the use of SSM Mode 2 revealed complex behaviors and motivations between PDTG work teams and their primary stakeholders. This led to significant organizational introspection and learning regarding the viability of both supporting on-the-ground work of organizations in social movements and generating academic critical theory based on their struggles. In addition, Ñoqanchiq participants enunciated the need to challenge social movement actors that do not respect diverse ways of knowing and acting in the world.

Using theory of change diagrams as “systems models” (i.e., as epistemological devices) that could be compared and contrasted led to changes in appreciative settings—i.e., changes in patterns of communicative interaction between different participants that reflect learning. The issues emerged and evolved as people enabled and constrained different ideas and interpretations of reality, with significant communication shifts eventually become “codified” in team-level theories of change.

In Chapters 5 and 6 combined, I have provided three different examples of how organizational capacity as learning emerged as shifts in patterns of communicative interaction, and how systemic methodology influenced these shifts. Systemic methodology in the Sirua case introduced different perspectives (and thereby, diversity in communicative interaction) that helped participants paint a composite picture of Corridor history, current challenges, visions, and conditions for positive change, which ultimately affected Sirua’s strategic intentions. Also with Sirua, the use of “methodological redundancy” helped develop and generate new layers of learning as the process iteratively “dug” deeper. With PDTG, the use of an advanced form of SSM (Mode 2) highlighted unique perspectives and

brought enabling-constraints into deeper contrast than that which might emerge in “everyday” communicative interaction. In all these examples, “organizational” capacity, as learning, emerges as changes in dominant patterns of communication between participants. Some of these changes in communicational patterns were further reinforced by documentation of maturing assumptions, theories of change with associated worldviews, and other maps and artifacts generated in the process—each representing explicit or implicit standards of fact or value. However, these artifacts are primarily used from a soft systems perspective. In other words, they are not the learning “products” of the process so much as they are epistemological devices—props in the drama and not the drama itself—that help participants ask better questions of their real life challenging situations and stimulate active communicative interaction. From this reflective communication, capacity, as learning, emerges. This concept of learning existing as an emergent quality of interaction is reflected in a statement by Marco shared in the last PDTG workshop: *“Even when important changes weren’t documented our ownership and actual changes in programmatic identity are more important than any document”* (Marco). In PDTG’s case, learning is not attributable to the codification of ideas in a Theory of Change, but to consistent change in appreciation as indicated in significant changes in communicative interaction.

Moreover, in all these examples, it is important to note “the method behind the method”. Certainly, drawings, skits, and other methods were important in stimulating certain types of reflections. However, the following practices appear to be equally or more important for revealing complexity and contributing to learning than any of the specific methods used along the way:

- Participant selection, including the inclusion of diverse participants who have not been historically included, and or participants who might have a distinctly different worldview. In other words, participation of diverse perspectives is a powerful technique for entering into the flow of

organizational complexity, including appreciation of how people experience population-wide patterns of behavior “outside” the organization.

- Ongoing reflection and the generation of a reflective workshop culture. Intentional open-ended reflection spaces allow issues to self-organize into new patterns of communicative interaction, in ways that may not occur when “efficiently” moving a workshop from moment to moment. In a post-workshop reflection session with Juan-Carlos, I shared that I was realizing that the reflective conversation, more than the method and the products, were the most important part of the process. The diagrams, maps, matrices, and other artifacts that find their way onto flipcharts and cards are not “the results” of the workshop, but props used to generate more reflective and meaningful gesturing processes between people. As such, conscious critical reflection throughout ‘about both the situation itself and also about the thinking about it’ (Checkland and Poulter, 2010: 234) is perhaps the most important of the SSM activity types (type 5) because it is in this reflection that some of the most interesting shifts on communication—and thereby learning—emerged in both processes.
- Repetition or successive approximations. This stands in stark contrast to “clean” opening and closing of analyses, in which Julio thoughtfully noted that participants *‘take these products as a reduction and then look for new information somewhere else’* (Julio).
- Generating reflective questions throughout, regardless of the method. This is essentially what is meant by the SST shift from belief in real, objectively definable, problems, and solutions (ontology) to appreciating everything we (all participants) generate in change processes as a source of good questions to ask of complex realities, and not reality itself (epistemology).

In the next chapter, I turn to focus on how power relationships mitigate all communicative interaction, and thereby affect how learning and capacity emerge. This includes exploration of how all methodology enacts power

relations, and as such, cannot be thought of as neutral processes that exist outside of patterns of organizational communicative interaction.

7. Power relationships condition the patterns of communicative interaction that emerge in each case

Chapter formatting key

Voice	Formatting
Alfredo as narrator of empirical data	Text in regular Times New Roman font
Alfredo as interpreter and analyst	Verdana font and either under a sub-heading called "analysis" or in a single-cell table.
Participant voices	<i>"Double quotation marks and italics"</i> When included in my analysis, they are also in Verdana font.

7.1. Introduction and chapter focus

In **Chapter 4**, I focused on how PDTG's identity emerged in communicative interaction, which was enhanced by reflexive methodology that incorporated multiple ways of knowing. I shared how a personal identity spider, change in residence drawings, and a debate on organizational relevance each revealed complexity in different ways and contributed to clarifying PDTG's emerging identity. In **Chapters 5 and 6**, I shared how the use of different perspectives as sources of diversity in reflective communication, successive methodological approximations, relational analyses, and SSM each contributed to learning for grappling with complexity, for both Sirua and PDTG. In this chapter, I focus on how power relations mediate communicative interaction in both cases, and thereby affect the patterns that emerge.

To do so, I first return to complex responsive processes theory to introduce explanations on how power relations affect conditions for "high quality" communicative interaction (7.2). I then return to the Sirua case to explore how communicative interaction as power relating enables and constrains possibilities for learning and change (7.3). Finally, I return to the PDTG case to share an example of how power relations between lead action-researchers and organizational leaders' shapes the action research process in ways neither intended (7.4).

7.2. How complex responsive processes (CRP) are mediated through power relations, which affects the quality of communicative interaction

As noted in **Chapter 5**, in CRP, knowledge and learning—understood as changes in patterns in communicative interaction—may emerge when sufficient responsiveness, connection, and diversity occurs in the membership of the group or organization (Griffin et al., 1999: 305). However, connection and responsiveness of members in an organization, as well as diversity in their makeup, all emerge through power relations. In other words, communicative interaction consists of relationships between people, and these relationships are organized by themes of an ideological nature that often justify the patterns of power relations (Stacey 2007: 445). In communicative relationships although no one actor can control all responses to gestures she or he initiates, and therefore cannot control the pattern of meaning that emerges, some actors clearly have more influence than others and can therefore enable and constrain interaction in important ways that ultimately affect how and when patterns of interaction change. The conditions that affect the patterning of power relations are variations in relational qualities of human communication, including ‘the movement of affinity/antipathy, inclusion/exclusion, identity/difference, competition/co-operation,...and experiences of anxiety/spontaneity’ (Shaw, 2002: 68). The way people manage or are managed by these qualities affects how patterns of interaction and learning emerge in organizations.

From a complexity perspective, this means that through communicative interaction or exclusion, competition, cooperation, and so on, people generate *conditions* for interaction and *patterns* of interaction of three broad types:

- 1) Patterns may exist in which people experience conversations as stuck and repetitive, or thought of in a positive light, patterns that are reassuringly familiar and stable (Shaw 2002: 68). In the computer simulations shared in Chapter 2, these patterns occur in conditions of low connectivity between agents, low diversity amongst agents and sluggish interaction (Shaw 2002: 66).
- 2) It follows that patterns may exist that are anarchic, anxiety-producing and unstable, more likely occurring in conditions of high connectivity and diversity, and intense interaction and information exchange (Shaw 2002: 66). These chaotic conditions may generate a loss of meaning and even alarming experiences of loss of self in those who are interacting (Shaw 2002: 68), while also potentially leading to the disintegration or dissipation of the organization.

- 3) Transitioning between stability and chaos is a third broad type of patterning behavior *at the edge of chaos*, in which order and disorder, randomness and repetitiveness paradoxically coexist.

In CRP it is in this third state—edge of chaos—that spontaneous change is possible. However, since no one can manufacture or measure the edge of chaos, and because it is a transition phase that might be teetering on chaos or dissipating into stuck repetition, CRP seeks “fluid conversation” as a “safe enough” state to promote (Stacey, 2007: 441). The analogue to edge of chaos in CRP is fluid conversation. As such, it is important to pay attention to conditions for fluid conversation (i.e., communicative interaction) and therefore, learning. To do so, Stacey (2007: 442-450) advocates focusing attention on:

- The quality and diversity of participation, and how these may be affected by power relations
- The fluidity of communication, and how this generates rich, active dialogue and relating. This includes being aware of levels of anxiety, and how that affects communication.
- How people deal with unpredictability and paradox in communicative interaction. This includes paying attention to the extent to which methodological choices support the generation of fluid conversation, taking into account the opportunities and conditions that emerge in a particular complex reality.

In the next two sub sections (7.3. and 7.4.). I present two examples of how power relations affect *conditions* for interaction and *patterns* of interaction:

7.3. Communicative interaction as power relating generates dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, and affects how learning and change emerge with Sirua

7.3.1. *The “discovery” of Sirua San Lorenzo by Alfredo and Fabricio generates momentum to shift the center of gravity of the AR process from Quito to San Lorenzo*

7.3.1.1. Background

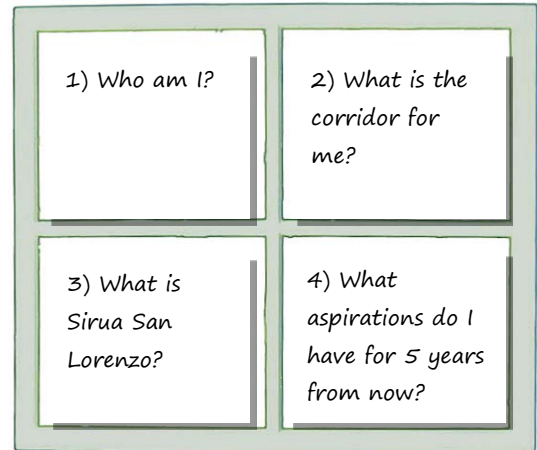
After carrying out the first two Sirua workshops in Ibarra and Quito, my co-researcher Fabricio and I conducted our first field visit to San Lorenzo. We wanted to be able to see the Corridor, the field office and field staff, and to continue exploring the differences in perspectives regarding Sirua’s challenges. We only had one day available so were limited in what we could do, and although we had initially planned to visit two communities and Sirua’s offices, we

ended up only being able to visit Sirua’s offices and carry out a short 3-hour workshop on the morning of October 27, 2009. After carrying out an initial warm-up exercise to get to know people, we did an exercise called “Four

windows into Sirua San Lorenzo” in which we

Figure 47—Four windows exercise questions

asked participants to draw answers to the questions in four windows that they would sketch on a flip chart (see **Figure 47**). After each person presented her or his drawing, we conducted a plenary, and then organized into three groups to do a collective “read” of the themes that had emerged based on the following questions: a) What do we share regarding our aspirations?, b) What do have (i.e., what are our different types of assets or abilities) to be able to achieve our aspirations?, c) What is going well?, and d) What worries us? We then carried out a final plenary reflection.



A few days later, Fabricio and I presented our field visit observations to Fernando, Julio, Rob, and Sirua board member Silvia Harcourt in a half-day feedback meeting in Quito (what I refer to as WS4). In that meeting, we also discussed the next steps for the action-research. I now share the main themes Fabricio and I presented in that meeting, as well as the major issues that emerged in the subsequent feedback process. I interject interpretive analysis throughout to highlight how power relations affect the process in specific moments. All analysis is separated in single cell tables, with text in Verdana font.

7.3.1.2. Key themes and issues presented by Fabricio and me

Alfredo: Note: direct quotations do not include people’s names because I was not able to clearly distinguish who was speaking in each case from the recordings.

- **People, movement and identity in Sirua San Lorenzo**

In the presentation, we first shared that we had been surprised by the number of people in the office (10 people participated in the workshop and two were not available—see **Figure 48**), as well as their fluid discourse regarding themes important to the Corridor and the region. We

wondered aloud what the significance of local operations might mean for Sirua's overall identity, and we presented four options designed to provoke a response:

- 1) Sirua is a hybrid organization comprised of personnel from FFI and Sirua that is neither one nor the other, but a mix (this was the initial understanding Fabricio and I had entering the process)?
- 2) Sirua is an independent local organization that receives support from FFI (this was the common discourse that we often heard from participants in Quito)?
- 3) Sirua is a distinct organization in Quito and another in San Lorenzo?
- 4) Sirua is a complex organization with elements of vision and identity in different organizations and locations, but difficult to identify as an overall coherent entity?

The main message we delivered in our presentation was that there were many people, much identity and movement in Sirua San Lorenzo, which had changed our perception as researchers as to "what is Sirua?"

Figure 48—Participants in the mini workshop



- **Ownership of San Lorenzo Staff in Sirua's cause**

We then shared that we had found what seemed to be a higher level of ownership in SL staff than we had previously assumed (and been told). We found that people identified with their

work, including connecting their perceptions of “a better life” with the conservation of local natural resources, and a healthier community:

“We aspire for a well-maintained Corridor and for the wellbeing of the workers. This includes achieving the integration and backing of communities, as well as civil, institutional and military authorities.”

“We desire a county that is clean and without violence” and “to have a physical space to carry out our work that allows us to provide sustenance to our families and at the same time pursue a future with dignity”.

Natural resource conservation aims were also expressed as a desire to end woodcutting and hunting, and protect local species in danger. Many participants were fluent in the many challenges Sirua faced and clearly connected Sirua’s work to these challenges by expressing a desire to: *“help improve life conditions of the people on the palm plantations and create economic alternatives (for communities)”*, maintain the current greenhouses to continue supporting communities, and get Sirua’s butterfly business up to speed to generate resources.

Figure 49—Segundo’s 4 windows



The last point we made was that we had found it interesting that some employees seemed to connect Sirua’s fight to their own fight for survival in the hostile environment in and around SL: *“We have a physical space and the goodwill of the entire work team from the Canton of San Lorenzo, and with the firm decision to make people respect our Corridor as long as we are alive”*. One participant even expressed a predisposition to fight related to the Corridor’s protection, and another connected his willingness to take on this cause with his admiration of Sirua—a respected organization for not having run from the area like other NGOs did. As people who are from the area and must fight for survival, we found it interesting, as a hypothesis, that self-identification with Sirua might exist, for some, in perceiving Sirua as part of the same local fight for survival.

However, this dedication was also very contingent on day-to-day survival, as one participant noted: *“At \$240 per month a lot of dedication is needed to opt to protect the forest instead of cutting down a couple of trees that give me even more—and I know the people do it out of*

need”. At several moments, participants addressed the economic theme directly as well noting limitations in being able to do their jobs effectively, e.g., *“We don’t even have credentials to identify ourselves as Sirua employees, [even though we are] professionals and a trained team who support the Corridor and who are willing to further grow and develop”*.

Figure 50—Jinet’s 4 windows



- **Sense of isolation and abandonment**

We relayed many messages we heard regarding a generalized feeling of abandonment and lack of appreciation and recognition of the work Sirua SL does. Several participants expressed feeling disconnected with the Quito office, including a sense of abandonment. For example:

- *I don’t know the Quito office...The Quito people never come here. Julio has never been here.*
- *The bosses are absent for months and you guys come*
- *There is no family relationship with those from Quito. If the husband hides something from the wife, or vice-versa, everything becomes jealous. That is how the Foundation is run. We don’t know what’s going on.*

Figure 51—Eladio’s 4 windows



Fabricio and I also noted that participants seemed to be “overly” grateful for the space to share, expressing thanks many times. Different participants had asked us that we be their “loudspeakers” on these issues when we returned to Quito. Fabricio and I were surprised about this reaction and noted that spaces seem to be lacking for people to share knowledge with each

other in general. At the same time, we noted we were aware of not reading too much into a single visit.

- **Possible roles for rangers in a complex environment**

In our presentation, Fabricio and I openly speculated in a rhetorical tone that if the rangers were as sharp as they had seemed, perhaps Sirua's concept of rangers could expand to include Fernando Morcillo's suggestion in the first workshop that they be trained to also act as educators. We also shared how our growing appreciation of the challenges of conserving the Corridor, which had led us to speculate if what was needed was a strategy for carrying out activities on a scale commensurate to the actual threats, versus a strategy of projecting an image of conservation capacity, presence, and credibility, in spite of the fact that they do not actually have the actual capacity to back it up. Echoing Fernando's earlier idea, we asked if this "Wizard of Oz strategy" might make sense in a complex environment such as this?

Figure 52—Teófilo's 4 windows



Before opening the session to feedback, we suggested some possible next steps, including suggesting that we attempt to better understand people's roles and talents in SL. We proposed conducting a full workshop in SL to map people's capacities and reinforce commitment to the SL team and connection with Quito. In response to the "who am I" question in the four windows, very few participants actually spoke about who they were as people, but rather what their role was in the organization. A full workshop dedicated to recognizing people's identity and talents could help better utilize their talents, while responding to previous workshop comments, such as: *"The foundation doesn't know about me"*. It could also help work on the self-esteem of different staff members: On three different occasions during the four windows drawing, two participants made comments such as: *"I didn't think I was capable of doing it"* (referring to being able to do a drawing). In our presentation, we suggested the workshop be themed as *"Promoting ownership, recognition of internal talents, and strengthening of identity"*. We also suggested defining how we might involve community members to enrich the action-research.

7.3.1.3. The conversation spontaneously shifts during the feedback session, exposing underlying power relations

After our presentation, we carried out a three-hour meeting with Fernando, Julio, Sylvia, and Rob to discuss the implications of our field visit for the action-research process. Four main themes emerged:

- **The possibility of developing stronger connections with SL personnel and addressing their basic needs**

Fernando provided initial reactions to our presentation by noting that he is aware that the SL staff members feel abandoned and that indeed they have not had the spaces to share these types of issues. Lenin's dwindling role in Sirua as he takes on his role in the government program SocioBosque has affected this further. He agrees we should do a workshop in SL along the lines of what Alfredo and Fabricio have proposed. However, he pushes back on the salary claims noting that the rangers work a short day—1/2 day of difficult patrol through the Corridor; but short nonetheless, which leaves time to pursue other activities. He also notes that the rangers are frequently sick, which he speculates might be related to “Afro-Ecuadorian idiosyncrasy”. Finally, regarding using the rangers in higher-level functions, he emphasizes that they (Sirua) need rangers to do ranger work, and if their skills are upgraded, they will want more money and new jobs, leaving Sirua without a solid ranger function. Rob agrees that professionalization of rangers is not the answer, noting that it did not work out as expected when implemented in the Galapagos islands, where Rob used to work. However, he emphasizes that something new does need to happen. I (Alfredo) suggest rotating roles, to which Fernando responds that they have already tried that, with the rangers simply becoming bored in their new roles.

Alfredo: In our presentation, Fabricio and I have unintentionally put Fernando in a difficult position by revealing that we were so surprised by the level of operations we found in San Lorenzo. He is not caught by surprise because I have taken care to brief him on our findings beforehand and asked him for input. However, as in several other situations, he indicated to me that he was OK with whatever we presented because he felt it would be important for FFI staff to hear. In front of the larger group, however, we observe surprise on Rob, Julio, and Sylvia's faces as we speak of what we saw and experienced. This surprise implies that the one person in the meeting with first-hand knowledge of SL operations, Fernando (due

to his relatively frequent on-the-ground work there), has not communicated this clearly before, or at least not from the perspective from which we are communicating it. Julio and Rob of FFI might be in a tense situation as well, learning about important details of FFI's most important investment in Ecuador that neither has ever seen first-hand. However people may be interpreting the situation, Fabricio and I later reflected that we had perceived participants to be both tense and curious, and were unsure how the conversation would emerge from there.

- **The desirability of shifting Sirua's main office from Quito to San Lorenzo to reflect where organizational energy appeared to be**

Early in the feedback session, Rob, reflecting on our presentation, noted that people seem to feel random, unassociated and unmotivated. He suggests that to clarify the organization's identity, they should consider "*moving the center of gravity towards San Lorenzo to begin to construct more local identity in the institution, which would also have implications for the board of directors, as we spoke of last week...It seems like we should build on that which is strong and move to San Lorenzo*" (Rob). He then clarifies that moving the center of gravity does not mean that someone at a high level would not be needed in Quito (indirectly referring to Fernando), but that planning, decision making, and convening space would all be affected. Rob then changed the subject to the idea of professionalizing rangers (covered earlier), which set off a series of additional exchanges on the reasons for not doing so.

Alfredo: I felt a palpable anxiety in the room when Rob made this suggestion. Fabricio and I were presenting our findings in an exploratory way, but we did not anticipate that the new knowledge we would present would lead to considerations that could threaten Fernando's position within the current power configuration. Being the only formal Sirua representative (Sylvia was stepping down from the board) and the director, our presentation should ostensibly have been primarily to Fernando, yet suddenly he was outnumbered, with his main funder making a suggestion that could radically change his job. Rob let us all off the hook by changing the conversation himself, but the conversation has already begun attracting around a potential new center of gravity for Sirua in SL.

Fernando then brings the conversation back to our earlier question about the type of hybrid organization that Sirua might be (the 4 options in 7.3.1.2.). He mentions that Sirua is indeed a hybrid and notes that clarifying identity is a real concern because to most SL staff, Sirua is still FFI, which in part, is due to the fact that 50% of the staff dates back to the NYTUA days—a time in which most people thought “*practically we are FFI*”. Julio responds that if this is the case, even more reason exists to move the center of gravity to SL, because the reason they see Sirua as FFI is perhaps due to the fact that Sirua leadership is in far-away Quito. According to Julio, this situation is further complicated by the administrative support he provides to Sirua SL, which again reinforces the idea that FFI is in charge (to which Fernando notes that this administrative support has advantages as well). Rob then offers the example of FFI in Belize, who, after specifying who was in charge, and more intentionally separating the offices, brought significant clarity to leadership there.

Alfredo: Fernando appears to be attempting to broaden the framing from a simple “center of gravity” issue to an overall identity issue in which FFI is complicit. However, Julio and Rob both offer examples that constrain that line of thinking and keep the focus on the issue of SL as a possible center of operations. Sensing an unintentional but real full-court press against Fernando by Julio, Rob and Sylvia (who also made affirmative statements), I changed the subject to reduce the pressure and avoid losing credibility with Fernando. I was beginning to worry it might look as if Fabricio and I were supporting an ambush, which was not the case (nor did we perceive this was intended by anyone from FFI).

Later in the same session, as we were discussing the next steps, Fernando briefly left the room to attend to other business. When he left the conversation sobered a bit regarding possibilities of moving leadership to SL. Julio affirmed that a true managerial presence is needed in SL, especially given Lenin’s ever-diminishing role as he transitions to Sociobosque. However, Fernando just started law school and would find it difficult or potentially undesirable to relocate to SL. Perhaps spending a week a month might work? Regardless, any decision has financial implications, which makes hiring someone in true managerial capacity in SL temporarily not feasible.

Alfredo: Fernando is the formal representative of Sirua but this role has emerged out of a history of collaboration in which he began as an FFI employee and later moved to Sirua. In practice, Fernando is part of a power configuration that leads and operates Sirua, which includes significant administrative and strategic support from Julio, and almost complete dependence on funding support from FFI. This power configuration has generated perceptions by many Sirua SL staff members that Fernando continues to represent FFI and that Sirua SL is a field project of Quito-based FFI/Sirua. These perceptions, and indeed, the configuration itself, enable and constrain possibilities for future action.

For example, it is in FFI's programmatic and strategic interests (and declared intentions) that Sirua be an independent local organization that receives support from but does not depend on FFI. The concept "local partner" is an idealization or aspiration central to FFI's strategy and identity: *"Lasting local partnerships have been at the heart of our conservation activities for more than one hundred years"*²². Shifting Sirua's main center of gravity to SL would be an important step in making this a reality—it would represent an overt action that potentially starts a path towards true independence as an organization. The knowledge shared by Fabricio and I about *a real organization already operating with its own local identity* initiated and enabled this line of thinking, perhaps making the logical next step to move the head to where the body was ostensibly already thriving (I exaggerate to make a point). Pictures, anecdotes, and a logical narrative presented by Fabricio and I in a "professional" PowerPoint (PPT) presentation certainly made this seem more real and feasible.

Shaw notes that power configurations are historical, social, local communicative processes in which our activities simultaneously perpetuate and potentially transform the patterns which sustain and evolve our joint capacities to act in some ways rather than others (Shaw, 2002: 73-4). In

²² Taken from <http://www.fauna-flora.org/about/>, accessed 5-October-2012. I also know this from multiple conversations with FFI personnel.

this process, although participants from Sirua, FFI, and the facilitators may each be developing political intentions or trying to influence the direction the conversation goes, shifts in power figurations may occur spontaneously and unpredictably, beyond the control of any one party or group. When Rob suggested a move to SL, he temporarily separated Sirua from the power configuration that holds Sirua and FFI together, which generated a feeling of anxiety (as far as Fabricio and I perceived it) due to the obvious implications that such a move would entail. However, although the initial idea generated additional enabling feedback, including an anecdote by Rob on how this idea had already been successful in Belize, two important sets of interventions constrained the idea and restored the original power configuration. First, Fernando reminds people of the inseparability of the two institutions in people's minds, insinuating that they are inseparable in practice as well, and implying that all those listening know this as well as he does. Although this generates a reaction reaffirming the need to shift office location, funding realities eventually sober the discussion—any move signifies costs, which signifies additional investment from FFI, which they do not currently have.

In practice, although the different actors in the power configuration have different levels of influence, the configuration itself is relatively stable because both actors are co-dependent. FFI needs Sirua to be a true local partner (and sees its investment as supporting just that) and in exchange, FFI provides resources and support. Fernando keeps things running in SL, in an incredibly complex environment, and at very low cost (relative to similar conservation programs). Up until this point, Fernando has represented the main doorway to the local partner Sirua, and he would be needed to legitimately manage any transition. Were Fernando to leave, a fear Sylvia has expressed earlier, FFI would have a difficult time shifting Sirua operations to SL, especially without significant new resources. This would expose the blurriness of who was really in charge of Sirua. Thus, paradoxically, when Fernando steps out—a moment in which FFI representatives might have felt less constrained to think more creatively

about a move—FFI representative Julio lowers the expectations to perhaps a week per month in SL (this “one week per month” idea was later designed into a management process through soft systems analysis, not presented in this dissertation). The intertwined history of relating, resource constraints on changing locations and existence of co-dependencies between the two organizations present a strong power configuration that does not easily allow for shifts to new patterns of interaction. Although the workshop conversation is attracting around the possibilities of a move to SL, the pattern does not stabilize into an attractor that actually changes behaviors. The new attractor dissipates due to the history of stability of the relationship between FFI and Sirua.

- **The need to be more reflective and critical about Sirua’s governance problems, including Sirua’s role in those problems**

At one point in the feedback session, Board member Sylvia emphatically stated that she has never been to the Corridor in the three years she has been on the board, which cannot only be blamed on difficult circumstances—it is Sirua’s fault as well. She reaffirms (from an earlier interview) that Sirua currently has essentially no governance—“*Sirua’s board is one of the most dysfunctional that I know*”—and that the lack of responsibility of the board is really upsetting to her. However, she clarifies that Sirua is responsible for showing the Corridor to board members so that they might buy in. Rob agrees that all board members need to get to know the Corridor first hand, and adds that the group also needs to speak about who might comprise the board, including adding people from the Corridor area to sit on the board: “*You need people with a strong connection with the area*” (Rob). This view is an ongoing position that Rob has taken ever since the second workshop. He adds that what Sirua has now is a board without experience, culture, affinity or other types of association with the Corridor. Julio then restates the urgency of FFI defining *its own* role vis-à-vis the board, because in spite of attempts to explain that FFI is not in charge, “*they still think I’m in charge*” (Julio). This situation needs to end because “we’re not a faucet” (Julio), yet “*for FFI, if the governance challenge isn’t resolved, we’re not going to let go*” (Rob). I (Alfredo) asked how to get the ball rolling on the board reform “sub-process”, to which Fernando suggests that they send a two-page letter to the board outlining the issues that have been emerging and a process for addressing those issues. Rob adds that board members should be added soon, and that a trip to the Corridor for existing members should be arranged.

Alfredo: For Rob, a powerful board represents perhaps the most important strategy for generating a truly autonomous and sustainable local partner. In fact, he reveals that this is a precondition to FFI being willing to reexamine its role in the current power configuration. Insistence on addressing governance is a recurrent theme for Rob, which is taken up in several moments during the action-research (always initiated by Rob) and generates an overall conclusion that the board is dysfunctional and needs replacing. In spite of it becoming a priority on paper, with clear actions delineated, action is not taken to reform the board. I return to this in the last chapter of the dissertation.

7.3.2. The action-research process itself shifts center of gravity and contributes to more open participation of rangers, and thereby, diversity of thought and communicative interaction

After the SL workshop and feedback sessions described above (October 2009), we conducted two more major workshops in Sirua's SL office (December 2009 and March 2010), and an all-day Corridor walk with Sirua rangers, FFI staff from Quito and England (who were visiting), and additional visitors. Fernando also conducted activity mapping exercises with SL rangers and technical staff as an input into the strategic planning process. None of these actions had been previously anticipated, but were prioritized in conversations primarily between Fabricio, Fernando, Julio and me (not always the four of us). Although much impetus to invest additional energy in SL staff participation had come from mine and Fabricio's post-field visit in October—which had generated pressure from FFI representatives to move in that direction, as noted above—Fernando and I had already been enabling each other's ideas to incorporate the SL perspective more fully since after the first workshop. Fernando was a big advocate of SL participation, both because he had been impressed with their thoughtful participation, but also because he was insistent that others understand their perspective and get to know organizational actors better. He felt that FFI staff did not fully understand the nature of the work in the Corridor, or the challenges in managing SL staff in such a precarious environment and with so few resources. Bringing SL participants into the action-research process would increase exposure of FFI staff to that world, which Fernando confided in me would be a positive development.

In Chapter 5, I shared how inclusion of SL perspectives introduced diversity in ideas and influenced emerging patterns of communication related to organizational strategic intentions. However, we later learned that the efforts we had made to include and get to know SL staff had also helped overcome a tacit boycott of the action-research process by Sirua rangers and technical staff. In December 2011, approximately a year after action-research activities were complete, I conducted a one-day reflection process with Sirua staff from both offices (taking advantage of the fact that I was already in Quito on other business). During a review of how different participants had experienced different moments in the process, Sirua ranger Teófilo shared his feelings about the importance of the first workshop in Ibarra: *“For me this was the first time something like this occurred and it was fundamental. I know we have not yet achieved the goal but with time we will; with all the work we are doing this is going to go far. We park guards feel really well that this process started because before... we were completely blind without communication and now we see that that false communication has been opened; when we want to speak we are respected and we didn’t have that before. For this reason, for us this first workshop in Ibarra created a new expectation”* (Teófilo). Indeed, in the first workshop’s oral evaluation, Teófilo had expressed significant gratitude for having been invited: *“First of all I take with me the experience because I had never participated in a workshop of this magnitude before... This is the first opportunity I have had to be in a workshop of this level. Through the workshop I got to know people I hadn’t had the chance to get to know before. And well, thank you to all for the presence we had here, and for the next opportunity, please keep me in mind”* (Teófilo). Now, almost two years later, he makes a more dramatic point:

Teófilo: I think that at the beginning when the workshop in Ibarra was going on we hadn’t made the decision to give the necessary information about what was going on in the Corridor. But in the workshop—and because we knew that the next workshop would be in San Lorenzo—we made the decision to speak once and for all.

Juan-Carlos: This occurred after Ibarra (WS1) and before San Lorenzo (WS3)?

Alfredo: Juan-Carlos, from the PDTG process, was present in this Sirua reflection session, along with Fabricio and me. Juan-Carlos was facilitating.

Teófilo: Yes

Juan-Carlos: And how did you make this decision; did you meet up, just talk?

Teófilo: During our free time or when we were walking ... we would talk about things and hear one person’s idea, and then another person; and there we made the decision. “Let’s not hold back anymore”; that’s the bomb (referring to his card): “We decided to share—‘qué reviente la bomba’ (may the bomb explode)”.

Lenin adds that after the workshop in SL (WS3), people within that office started looking after each other more—he feels they started acting more like a family. Little by little, they began to participate more openly in the process. The SL workshops were registered as very important to the local staff.

7.3.3. Analysis

Fabricio and I were not anticipating this revelation in this session, but in many ways, it just confirmed what had already been evident from previous evaluative moments. We knew that in general, SL staff had not participated in a meaningful way in past organizational change processes, and we also knew that the action-research process itself had essentially changed the center of gravity after WS 3 in SL. This final session primarily confirmed for us the following points (taken from the written portion of the evaluation session):

- The valuing of “human capital” not only as workers but as humans had been meaningful for participants
- Quito-San Lorenzo divisions had been improved through the process
- Reflective exercises helped deal with things not easily expressed otherwise
- Through the drawings in particular, participants were able to relate the “me” as a person to the Corridor activities that they implement

Both the technical/political decisions to hold more workshops in SL, and the methodological decisions to use reflective techniques, contributed to an enabling environment that made relevant outcomes more feasible. In both examples provided in this section, power relations emerged in communicative interaction, enabling and constraining possibilities for future action. I comment on this in more detail in the conclusion to this chapter (**section 7.5.**).

7.4. Power relations condition action research design \leftrightarrow action-research design surfaces unspoken power relations

7.4.1. Power relations generate anxiety and condition action-research process design for final PDTG workshop

Juan Carlos and I carried out the final workshop with PDTG in December 2010 in their offices in Lima. Between the Cluny theory of change workshops (Chapter 6) and this final workshop, Juan-Carlos and I participated in several meetings, a PDTG-facilitated event with social movement actors and various Skype and email exchanges, including working together on a PDTG-led article. All these actions emerged and were prioritized as part of the action-research process. In October 2010, Marco and Ana requested that Juan-Carlos and I co-design an end of year workshop with them to address significant transitions PDTG was facing on the immediate horizon. I share these transitions as Marco presented them in the actual workshop:

- First, Marco formally announced his transition to a new job as regional coordinator for a Belgian NGO, but assured people he would still be very present and active in PDTG, albeit less visible as the director of PDTG.
- Second, he introduced Ana as the new person in charge, acknowledging that she had already been in charge de facto of many coordination functions for some time.
- Third, he announced good and bad news regarding the funding situation.
 - o The bad news is that although many opportunities and some grant requests are already submitted, funding has slowed down and PDTG's most reliable funding sources from the past did not look promising. PDTG would need to explore an organizational structure that would be mostly supported by volunteer militants, and less by stable, paid personnel.
 - o The good news is that most people are safely funded for the next three to six months and PDTG's strong positioning with two key organizations might open new opportunities over the next few months.

In their October solicitation for support, Marco and Ana had indicated that the end of year workshop would be focused on: 1) managing these transitions and other challenges to prioritize objectives and scenarios for 2011, and 2) closing the action-research and generating reflections on both the content and methodology used. During my transit to Lima, however, (in the Houston airport), Juan-Carlos and I learned from Ana by email that due to the growing implications of the transition, she and Marco wished the entire workshop be focused on

planning how to move forward. The workshop dates had pushed up almost to Christmas Eve and they now lacked time to be able to address both the current transitional challenges and proper closing of the action-research. Ana stated that she and Marco did indeed wish to conduct a proper evaluation and closing of the action-research process, but there was simply no time in December.

This news led to significant tension, several emails between Ana and me (Alfredo), laying out pros and cons, and two meetings in Lima trying to work out the possibilities. I was in strong need of closing the action-research process for the purposes of his PhD, even though he could continue to work with PDTG on a different level afterwards. One evening over beer (in Pueblo Libre—a section of Lima), three days before the workshop, Ana, Marco, Juan-Carlos, and I came to an agreement. The workshop would indeed focus on future implications of the current transitional period, but we would do so methodologically by approaching issues in a temporal logic that explored relationships between past, present and future—*past* reflecting the action-research process and overall PDTG strengthening process of which the action-research was a part, *present* reflecting current challenges, and *future* representing the short term. Additionally, Marco and Ana would actively participate in the methodological design each day to ensure that the right balance was being achieved.

7.4.2. Analysis

Juan-Carlos, Marco, Ana and I had developed good working relationships over the action-research period. Alfredo and Juan-Carlos' methodological design in the Cluny workshops (Chapter 6) had been very well received and highly evaluated by most workshop participants, and Alfredo's participation as a methodological advisor to PDTG outside of the action-research workshops was growing and contributing to increased legitimacy of the action-research process (as noted by comments from Marco and Ana to Juan-Carlos and increased demand for participation of both of us under the action-research banner). Juan-Carlos' legitimacy as a process facilitator who was also fluent in political transformational discourse and was himself an active militant, was already high with PDTG members. However, as PDTG looked more and more to reflective methodologies, such as Reflect Action (R/A) in their own programmatic work, Juan-Carlos became even more important.

PDTG, often through Marco and Ana, were also very important to Juan-Carlos and me. The sharing of their live organizational case for my PhD process is obvious, but the political nature of their work offered Alfredo a particular opportunity to explore capacity-building in an overtly political situation. Considering that I was using my PhD as a way to explore my own activism and willingness to take a stand, including challenging supposedly value neutral capacity-building methodology, PDTG offered me a particular kind of experience and legitimacy that was not so easy to find in other possible cases. In short, PDTG conferred legitimacy to me as a commodity of power (Checkland and Poulter, 2006). PDTG also offered a unique opportunity to Juan-Carlos, because within social movements and political processes more generally, some adult educators and process facilitators believe they are considered to be mere “dinamiqueros” (crudely speaking, circus clowns who entertain with icebreakers) and not true political actors that are themselves part of social movements. Process knowledge in these spaces is seen by many as valid only as a means to an end—the end being political content knowledge. PDTG, with much influence from Juan-Carlos, was emerging into an organization that challenged this notion very actively by promoting critical reflection and the use of *R/A as a political tool for challenging hegemonic thought and narrow ways of valid knowing in political processes*. Juan-Carlos wished to continue being an active part in what he saw as an emergent social movement that saw transformational processes as ends in and of themselves. PDTG practitioners, including Marco and Ana, were key to this process.

In our Pueblo Libre meeting—just as in previous email exchanges and meetings—Juan-Carlos, Ana, Marco and I each used our legitimacy to present ideas, nuance and influence others’ ideas, and also be influenced both by others’ ideas and by each person’s perceived limits to negotiation. These communications generated tension and anxiety as participants staked out positions, thereby generating responses that did not seem to move towards resolution. As we enabled and constrained each other over beer in

a bar in Pueblo Libre, a solution emerged that protected the power configuration inherent in most client/consultant relationships—i.e., that any result must first be meaningful to the client. However, in our desire to be more than a narrow client /consultant power configuration, drawing on past legitimacy from our history of interacting, but also looking to our desire to maintain a healthy relationship in large part based on reflective learning and shared values, an accommodating deal was reached that was different from the expressed positions going into the conversation. Little, if any time would be allocated to formal evaluation of the action-research process, but relating present and future to past would in effect provide an interesting look at the relevance of past action-research activities *in relation to* the present and future. In conversation after the workshop, all four of us recognized that the mix that emerged was more interesting than either of our original proposals.

The accommodation emerged via communicative interaction (that embodied power relations) in which diversity was introduced in two important ways. Juan-Carlos and I respected the centrality of the client, but insisted on a learning worldview. That is, the results must be in large part based on what will be meaningful to the client, but the process must respect a learning focus. We had earned the legitimacy to strongly make this plea from our past experience of relating. The second way in which diversity was introduced was by Ana and Marco insisting on more methodological inclusion than they had had before, which challenged the autonomy Juan-Carlos and I had been given until now for most methodological design issues. The purposes of workshops had been collaboratively agreed upon in the past, but the methods had largely been left up to Juan-Carlos and me. These two types of diversity were both clearly present in how the workshop was ultimately approached. This led to a consistent pattern of interaction for the entire workshop focused on the concept “past-present-future” as a narrative continuum. In retrospect, this clash of appreciative settings represented a moment of action-research process maturation and learning, as the dominant patterns of communication shifted in ways more relevant

to the different parties involved. The capacity of the action-research process itself (understood as a pattern of communicative interaction) to offer relevant methodology to a complex situation, was strengthened.

7.4.3. A “powerless” workshop conversation shifts after facilitators “safely” put power on the table

Alfredo: Note, all reflections below are taken directly from session transcripts, which I have paraphrased for flow.

During the final workshop with PDTG in December 2010, we (all participants, facilitated by Juan Carlos and me) conducted three different rounds of reflection (over the first two days) focused on framing organizational challenges. The issue of problematic power relationships did not emerge as a workshop theme during these rounds (from the first two days of the WS) beyond an odd mention by Patricio on the need to process the reasons why some people have left PDTG (he was referring to Katy, who has left, in conflict, since the last workshop). Juan-Carlos and I introduced the issue of problematic power relationships during a presentation of major PDTG organizational challenges present when the action-research began. Although all these issues had been placed on the table before in interviews, workshops and workshop reports, Juan-Carlos and I had combined them into a composite map of major organizational challenges present when the action-research began 18 months earlier. As noted in **section 3.5.1**, these initial challenges had included problematic power relationships on different fronts.

When Juan-Carlos and I presented the issue of power relationships as part of the initial challenging situation, we were careful to remind people that they themselves had identified this as a key challenge area, both through interviews and quite prominently in the first two workshops. Even so, it was difficult to present, in large part because much of what had been perceived as problematic centered on the roles Marco and Ana—as organizational leaders and spouses—played in the conflicts that resulted in difficult separation processes with five people over the past two years. To put this on the table, even diplomatically, was to raise issues of the legitimacy and practices of organizational leadership. However, we needed to do so if we were to be able to reflect on changes and non-changes, considering these challenges represented an important “starting condition” of the action-research process.

After presenting these challenges, we (Juan Carlos and me) conducted a long plenary that included difficult, but what we perceived to be very honest, dialogue about PDTG's main challenges two years earlier, which included some clarifications offered by participants, but mostly affirmative responses and supporting anecdotes. After a timeline exercise to identify significant events that had occurred over the past two years, we began an exercise to identify changes and non-changes over the two-year period. To do so, we asked participants to indicate positive changes or

improvements on blue cards, negative changes on pink cards, and non-changes or stagnant behaviors on green cards (see **Figure 53**). We organized the responses into rough categories (orange cards) and then conducted a long reflective session analyzing each area.

Figure 53—Map of changes and non-changes over the AR period



The comparison of past to present reconfirmed some of the themes that had already emerged in the analysis of current organizational challenges, but qualified them as representing positive or negative changes. Three main change themes emerged in the discussion:

- a) How PDTG's militant activist identity—a complex mix of overly “busy” activism and militant identity—complicates attempts to generate spaces for sharing and learning.
- b) How PDTG's “hybrid” organizational structure, which had become more effective in finishing tasks and delivering products on time, still did not deal well with internal processes and conflicts.
- c) How ongoing power relationships continued to be problematic

Four main issues emerged around power (theme “c” above), which is the focus of the rest of this section (I do not address items “a” and “b”):

- 1) How specialization or work roles might be “naturally” separating those that think from those that do
- 2) How mechanisms for processing internal conflicts are still lacking

- 3) How understandings of power are directly connected to participants' life experiences, formation and worldviews; as such power relations need to be addressed at that level
- 4) How the facilitators' power has perhaps gone unchecked in the process thus far

I now briefly share participant reflections regarding each of these four areas of problematic power relationships.

Alfredo: Note, all content in this section is either direct quotes from participants or paraphrased language from participants, excluding Juan Carlos and me.

- **Does work specialization “naturally” separate those that think from those that do?**

Decentralization and specialization of work has allowed different people to grow into new areas and expand their own capacities (e.g., Nancy with communication technologies, Patricio with large event management, and Ana with proposal writing). However, Patricio notes that roles pertaining to financial management and fundraising, as well as systematization of experiences, tend to be assigned to the same people, thus separating “thinkers” from “doers”. This separation has subsequently become naturalized as part of the logic of role efficiency. He asks what it says about PDTG that they “naturally” leave the most important tasks to organizational leaders, even though they affect everyone’s survival. Marco responds that this is indeed a problem, but that is somewhat explained by the fact that during past times of crisis, many things were centralized for survival (i.e. due to the urgency of the moment), and that as things begin to work themselves out over the next few months, many tasks and roles will need rethinking. He asks if the current problem is a problem of power relations or individual capacities. To be able to develop a winning proposal requires *“knowledge and capacities, following certain procedures (although it sounds bureaucratic)... We need funding for publications right now, right; but with whom; how; with what capacity?”* (Marco)

However, Nancy has a different impression as she shares an example of a proposal writing training in which each person had to design a project, and *“some got involved more, others less, perhaps in relation to level of experience, laziness, capacities, etc. But since then on various opportunities I have asked for additional information to get involved in proposal writing and have received nothing. Now, we have to be able to do this collectively if we are to adapt and survive”* (Nancy). Silvia adds that what often happens is that everyone sees themselves as simple wheels on the car and not the car itself. More important tasks are left to leaders because

no one else picks them up. Now that she sees this more clearly, she can see how perhaps she could do more to share her creativity.

- **Mechanisms are still lacking for processing internal conflicts—improvisation is the norm**

Nancy opens by referring to “cyclical” tensions that reveal PDTG’s inability to process power relations effectively. Eventually, the conversation moves to a long discussion on how broader problems in society are reproduced in PDTG—machismo in particular: *“We’re part of the machista world that we wish to transform, and that conditions us”* (Ana). Ana and Marco extend the argument to broader gender issues within the organization, which leads Ana to share her own situation: *“With respect to power, and yes I’d like to share my own experiences with power and gender here at PDTG. As you might imagine, being a “jefa” (female boss), or being understood to be a jefa of an NGO that is shared with her husband, her partner, is nothing easy, and I have birthing scars to prove it. Birthing scars that have to do with the system of which we are all a part, with its common discriminatory practices. And I’d like to offer this as testimony to problematize the (power) challenge that we have in front of us”* (Ana).

Later, in the action-research evaluation session, several participants raised Katy’s exit from PDTG, which had not been mentioned directly in the session on changes and non-changes. This included questioning by Ricardo and Nancy on how the process could have been handled differently.

- **Understandings of power are directly connected to our life experiences, formation and worldviews; as such power relations need to be addressed at that level**

Ana, Nancy, Silvia, and Mariana give very different understandings of power relations. First, Ana notes that it is the *type* of power that matters, because power is not universal, unlike people’s conception of an “almighty God”. Ana’s conception of power is influenced by her political, anarchist, socialist, feminist, and communist formation. She problematizes power from class, race, and colonialist points of view, and she also considers how her marriage, her family, and life history affect how she understands power:

“Because it’s also an individual exercise of power; ‘Who exercises dominant power and who doesn’t?’ And which of those who do not cede privileges so that the domination occurs? I’m not talking about jefes or jefas—even the one who stays quiet exercises power. We’ve spoken in various moments about communication, about lack of sincerity, about not saying things directly; that’s an exercise of power, my friends. That we say things sarcastically, or cynically, or that we say things making fun of this or that characteristic of the compañeros (indigenous partners); that too is an exercise of power. But where does this take us? I think that we need to problematize power without losing the connection with our

personal experiences, our vision of change, our horizon for radical transformation, as each understands that radicalism, no?” (Ana)

Nancy feels she has a conception of power different both from those who have left and those who have remained:

“Because I’ve spoken with some of them (on their way out) and there are things that bothered them which don’t bother me so much. Because I come from a Guevarista political structure with its own unique idea of power. There are things that don’t affect me, that seem to be very natural to me, and other things less so. Ana always mentions gender and her experience. I agree and I think we need to talk about it. I also think we have been a bit scared to deal with this because it’s a sensitive theme no? But we need to deal with this with the seriousness that it deserves, no?” (Nancy)

However, to Silvia, power is earned through meritocracy:

“Honestly this talk of power has me a bit annoyed. I don’t know about you guys but power doesn’t attract me. Because I think there are natural hierarchies. Naturally one grows and obtains recognition without having to have a specific rank. I think that one positions herself based on the things that she does, for the projects she achieves, because of personal achievements rather than because he or she is the boss, or in charge of this or that. I don’t know, I think power is acquired individually based on your achievements” (Silvia; Mariana agrees).

- **The power of the facilitators is put on the table**

Ana notes how outside of consultative sessions with me and Juan-Carlos, most methodological decisions until this workshop had been left up to “the facilitators”. She adds that this has implications for the types of issues problematized in the process. For example, although she frequently brought up her perceptions of problematic machista behaviors in PDTG, Juan-Carlos and I—either by design or omission—rarely followed through on those issues. We were quick, however (in her perception), to follow through on issues of problematic power relations related to organizational leaders (see **section 8.2.5.** for a detailed analysis of this issue). Later in the reflection, others agreed that they had played too passive a role in shaping the action-research.

7.5. Analysis and chapter conclusion

In complex responsive processes, change and learning emerge when diversity in communicative interaction generates explorative conflict which is capable of shifting the dominant patterns of that communication. Small changes that may lead to bigger pattern shifts—positive or negative—are more likely to occur when diversity is present, which generates creativity and novelty in the gestures and responses of communicative interaction. However, as noted in the chapter introduction, the very presence or

absence of diversity is conditioned by power relaxations that enable and constrain the fields of possible change that might emerge.

The patterns that emerged in the Sirua case were clearly affected by power relations present in communication—particularly by those who had power to convene, facilitate, offer their own “real” participation, decide on the participation of others, or make decisions for the future of the action-research processes. Without a single word being spoken about which actor held more or less relative influence in the power configuration between Sirua and FFI, this configuration spontaneously emerged in back and forth communication. The conversation attracted around the idea of a possible move of Sirua head office from Quito to San Lorenzo. Although Rob introduced the idea unexpectedly, he was clearly building on the “diverse perspective” that me (Alfredo) and Fabricio offered from our field visit to San Lorenzo. According to Stacey, a condition for creative diversity ‘is some degree of subversive activity with the inevitable tension that that brings between shadow and legitimate themes which organize the experience of relating’ (Stacey, 2007: 446). Mine and Fabricio’s presentation clearly highlighted sensitive areas on the border between shadow and legitimate themes—between “discussables” and less-discussables. As external facilitators, we allowed ourselves to be audacious in what we presented (if not unintentionally subversive), and in the process, provided evidence of a real organization that was outside the current FFI-Sirua power configuration (in some ways). This introduced diversity to the otherwise stable FFI-Sirua storyline, thus shifting the pattern of communicative interaction in the workshop. However, this shift was ultimately not disruptive enough to challenge the deep co-dependencies that hold the Sirua FFI power configuration in place.

In the second Sirua example, Teófilo and the other rangers interacted in private to decide whether or not to subvert the AR process. At the same time, Fabricio and I, in communication with Sirua leadership (primarily Fernando and Julio), were making action-research design decisions to shift

more attention to San Lorenzo. This included the decision, primarily by Fabricio and I, to use (to the extent possible) reflective methodology that incorporates multiple ways of knowing. This decision helped generate trust in SL field staff (as we were told) and influenced the Rangers' decision to participate in the process. All these local interactions (and many others)—all mediated through power relationships—combined to affect the action-research process in ways that no one specifically intended. The simple decision by the least economically powerful cohort in Sirua not to boycott the process—a decision outside the control of any of the action-research process conveners—led to a more genuine participation by this cohort, which fundamentally affected the strategic intentions that emerged throughout the process.

The design of the last PDTG workshop was a case of all parties actively trying to shape the outcome of “high-stakes” negotiations. The back and forth process generated much tension and anxiety, which was clear in our emails and our gesturing processes during face-to-face meetings. Stacey notes that a key role of leaders and facilitators is to participate reflectively in conversations, paying special attention to how people use rhetorical ploys and exercise power relations that inhibit fluid conversation, or that generate anxiety that destabilizes conditions for effective relating (Stacey, 2007: 445). Some anxiety is inevitable and even desirable when it results from generative conflict capable of spurring new patterns of communication. However, constant anxiety is an ongoing generalized form of fear (Stacey 2007: 284), which is more likely to constrain than enable fluid conversation over time. Central to the ability to handle generative anxiety is sufficient trust between those engaging in difficult conversation (Stacey, 2007: 446). In our case, in spite of the tensions, our history of relating had generated adequate credibility and trust to be able to allow a novel solution to emerge from our power-imbued communicative interaction. The anxiety generated by the possibility that different participants' expectations would not be met did not paralyze communicative interaction, because of the underlying trust of the parties.

In the PDTG analysis of changes and non-changes, Juan-Carlos and I were confronted with the possibility that we apparently prefer to follow through on power conflicts as they relate to organizational leadership at PDTG, and less on how they relate to feelings of machista male domination as Ana experiences it. This analysis is consistent with critiques from feminist systems theory (FST) that women's perceptions may be taken as either unimportant or parallel to those of men, and thereby, go unaddressed (Stephens, 2012). Relative methodological autonomy in both processes gave me, Juan-Carlos, and Fabricio enormous power in dealing with themes of our choosing. Even though we consulted and co-designed the emerging process with both organizations (to different degrees), methodologically, we were given huge license to read situations and propose methods as we saw fit. We were undoubtedly influenced by our worldviews and preferences. For example, while I personally do care about how machista culture constrains opportunities for women, I do not see it as my primary battle and I do not become passionate about it. Juan-Carlos and I discussed this issue and he felt as I did. For this reason, we fully accepted Ana's reasoning that we had consciously or unconsciously neglected to follow through on those issues as she raised them.

We were not alone in this. Ricardo and Patricio never supported this line of argument either. Nancy, with her Guevarista worldview, sees this as a problem but does not prioritize it, whereas Silvia and Mariana see meritocracy before they see gender problems. When Ana would raise these issues, no attractor emerged because that which participants did not feel to be a personal battle did not resonate enough to shift patterns of communication—i.e. the diversity introduced by Ana could not overcome the lack of excitement on this issue by other participants. However, if this is a real problem, and I believe it is, then the facilitators have a particular responsibility to pay closer attention and draw it out—"give it a full hearing" as it were. As such, in complex responsive processes, it is important to pay attention to the ways in which different participants, including facilitators,

managers and researchers—who often see themselves as standing outside of an external system in which they are intervening—each participate, or do not, in local meaning making (Stacey, 2007).

The practical implication of being unreflective about how we participate—via power relations—in local meaning making is that these relations promote or restrict participation, diverse meanings and fluid communication that may be needed for shifting patterns of interaction to innovate and survive in complex environments. The ethical implications of ignoring power relating are that we may uphold and “make local” (i.e. reproduce) unjust societal power relations that deprive people of meaning or even their very livelihoods.

In the next and final chapter, I synthesize some of the major findings from across both cases and conclude the dissertation.

8. Implications for capacity building processes, and conclusions

Chapter formatting key:

Voice	Formatting
Alfredo as narrator of empirical data	Text in regular Times New Roman font
Alfredo as interpreter and analyst	Verdana font and either under a sub-heading called "analysis" or in a single-cell table.
Participant voices	"Double quotation marks and italics" When included in my analysis, they are also in Verdana font.

8.1. Introduction and chapter focus

The purpose of this final chapter is to highlight important learning in direct reference to my research questions. To do so, I synthesize key points from previous chapters and then offer some additional meta-level reflections. After specifically answering each question, I briefly explore some additional implications, and then conclude the dissertation.

Research questions:

How can systemic methodology help strengthen organizational capacities for grappling with social change in complex environments?

- 1) What methodological principles are relevant for strengthening organizational capacity in complex social change environments?
- 2) How can systemic methodology be helpful in this endeavour?
- 3) How does the complexity of specific organizational change realities affect the selection and effectiveness (i.e., relevance) of the capacity strengthening methodologies used?

8.2. What methodological principles are relevant for strengthening organizational capacity in complex social change environments?

8.2.1. *Extended epistemology, diversity, and patterns of communicative interaction*

Methodology that accesses multiple ways of knowing is helpful in accessing multiple doorways to diverse thought, feelings and identity. This diversity plays a key role in influencing the patterns of communicative interaction that emerge.

8.2.1.1. Overall reflections

With PDTG, the action-research process was mostly used to help improve patterns of internal relationships towards a collective “identity”. However, the process was also used to help clarify the relationships between internal organizational identity and the (external) needs of key actors in social movements. To explore identity issues, we (Juan Carlos and me) used several exercises inspired by Reflect Action (R/A) (see **section 4.2**). Early in the AR process, these exercises focused on individual identity (e.g., personal spiders, change in residence), and in some cases on shared identity (the debate). In some moments, these methods helped uncover diverse thought relevant to organizational challenges, ultimately leading to strong challenges to PDTG’s militant culture and the effects it engenders. These methodological experiences (along with similar experiences with Sirua) helped me see how methodology that incorporates multiple ways of knowing can be helpful in accessing multiple doorways to diverse thought, feelings, and identity. These methods can reveal diversity in personal history, people’s likes and dislikes, worldviews, cultural and social affinity, and other categories of thought and feeling that constitute peoples’ emerging identities and which flow from their experiences. Many of these sources of diversity are not available when people do not express themselves outside their professional personas. When introduced, however, they may contribute to spontaneous shifts in patterns of communicative interaction.

In the final PDTG evaluation, participants noted that the action-research was helpful in providing methods to increase self-knowledge, team integration, and resolve conflicts. They also noted that PDTG's overall strengthening process, including the action-research, helped people develop confidence to work with each other and to deal with personal differences. This process supported healthier relationships between individuals and "the organization". Ricardo, for example, felt that the group had generated empathy through the different workshops to understand each other better, which led to a shared vision and team spirit. Nancy noted that organizational members have new confidence to express feelings and reflect openly, thus contributing to more transparency in people's motivations. In addition, Mariana, Patricio, and Nancy noted that the ability to see difference as a source of strength was a helpful part of an overall effort to depersonalize conflicts, even as we (all participants) were digging deeper into problematic issues.

But to what extent was this actually the case? Several people with views or work habits outside the evolving organizational norms have left over the past two years, leaving behind the group that is now expressing a sense of improved integration. Might this integration have been achieved at the cost of the diversity necessary to change patterns of communicative interaction and remain relevant? Additional reflection is needed on both the benefits and consequences of achieving "hard-fought" integration.

We also saw how these methods were capable of generating exclusion. "The debate", for example, took on a life of its own and exaggerated enabling-constraints²³. This discussion led Katy and Simona to share their rich picture drawings, which revealed that they were self-isolating themselves from the rest of the organization. In the first two PDTG workshops, reflective exercises helped Katy expose her reluctance to jump on the PDTG ship no fewer than three times. This happened again in the third workshop in

²³ As a reminder, "enabling-constraints" are communicational power relations that enable some ideas and actions and constrain others, thus affecting how change or movement into the future occurs.

Cluny, several months later. Katy was no longer part of the organization for the fourth (closing) workshop. In that workshop, Marco cites that a strength of the process was that it helped surface levels of commitment and revealed *“those that could be part of the process and those that couldn’t... even contributing to certain people leaving”* (Marco). He notes that future processes would need to continue this focus on individual identity and personal commitment on the one hand, and better understanding of individual capacities and needs on the other:

“What does each person need to feel more comfortable and to be able to assume their work responsibilities”

(Marco)? Thus, while methodologies that utilize multiple ways of knowing might be helpful in generating diverse thought and unguarded “everyday” conversation, they present significant participation risks that must be considered if the aim is not to produce destabilizing effects or endanger people’s ability to protect their deeper identities. In fact, ***identity-based exercises reveal motivations***

and fears—they expose people, and can be used against participants as well.

“I think that the way we carried out the strengthening process mobilized our energies and allowed us to see personal things. In a given moment I hid it, I felt exposed (naked) and it shook me up, but in another moment it generated confidence. Nakedness of my feelings, I felt the process exposes you, but that nakedness doesn’t necessarily make you uncomfortable because it makes you feel confident eventually. It’s like you’re not able to hide things and that’s good—at work to not hide so many things” (Nancy)

Katy clearly showed her resistance to PDTG interests all along (this observation was shared by many participants), but the action-research techniques we (mostly selected by Juan Carlos and me) used clearly contributed to her departure, which raises important ethical questions about the use of methods that dig deeper and expose us as people, beyond our professional selves. In the final PDTG evaluation (in workshop 4), Ricardo expresses his feeling that more could have been done to have addressed Edwin and Katy’s needs before they had left PDTG and it was too late. He

also questioned the way they were handled on their way out, again alluding to unhealthy power relationships. He felt that important issues would clearly emerge in workshops such as ours, but then two months later, the whole thing would explode, perhaps unnecessarily. He noted that at some point in our process we deprioritized the individual in favor of the collective (note: “the collective” was the purpose of the action-research). Patricio agreed with Ricardo that individual identity is perhaps the most important factor to prioritize methodologically because it is what most influences workplace behavior—i.e. better understanding motivations can contribute to further integration amongst people at work. However, better processes, and perhaps methodological safeguards, are needed to help people who expose themselves to not have that exposure used against them.

With Sirua, participation of the rangers and technical staff from San Lorenzo, in addition to the participation of community members and Sirua partner organizations, all clearly “marked” the personality and results of the action-research process. Risks existed in this situation as well, particularly with Sirua rangers exposing their internal dialogue and sharing more deeply who they were as people throughout the process. In the first workshop oral evaluation, Julio noted that the participation of local staff had been the most valuable thing and added that this was in part due to the egalitarian nature of the workshop “space”: *“Here, in this moment hierarchies don’t work; in this moment we’re not thinking ‘the boss has to rub me the right way, I have to say what he thinks’; Instead were at (Nicaragua: ‘the same level’); exactly, the same level. So we can joke openly...”* (Julio). I do not doubt that for many, in certain moments, this was the case. However, we know that in other moments, these same participants were discussing within their peer group whether or not to boycott the very process in which they were later speaking openly. The current Sirua/FFI power configuration depends in part on local rangers with a low pay scale doing the work for which they are paid. But a fundamental change in that configuration depends on local staff taking significant ownership of the Corridor on behalf of an organization that they might eventually perceive as their own. This sort of local ownership is

not developed, I do not believe, in a workshop or series of workshops, but in a sustained process in which actual power balances shift beyond an increased ability to speak one's mind in workshops or meetings. Ongoing meaningful participation that generates not only diversity in thought, but also an ability to change patterns of relating, has at best only started with this process. Teófilo and other San Lorenzo field staff took significant risk in openly sharing in a situation *in which actual power balances have not shifted*.

That said, particularly in the Sirua process, organizational leaders actively promoted diversity in participation and sought out ideas that might shake the current stuck patterns of relating. In addition, methods that helped personalize San Lorenzo staff beyond work categories, such as "ranger", helped initiate important new conversations on the nature and location of organizational identity. Beyond people's intentions, an important constraint to major changes was the lack of resources to actually do anything new. I address this constraint in **section 8.4**.

8.2.1.2. Methodological implications for capacity-building

The incorporation of R/A principles and methods at Juan-Carlos' behest turned out to have a huge influence on the overall AR process. The use of creative, aesthetic forms of knowing, combined with ongoing, intentional reflection (see **section 8.2.4.**) generated diversity from within people's own experience, which then affected broader patterns of communicative interaction and learning. "Senti-cuerpo-pensante" (SCP) is a clear expression of the concept of "multiple ways of knowing", as presented in Heron's pyramid of experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing (see **section 3.4.2.**). **Experiential** knowing is that which we come to know, tacitly or explicitly, through everyday living. It is knowing through the immediacy of perceiving, through empathy and resonance, in direct presence of and in relation to persons, places or things (Heron and Reason, 2008: 367). Lived experience *is* SCP in that it utilizes in everyday interaction all senses, emotions, and intuitions which are "hard-wired" in our beings. SCP clearly extends to **presentational** knowing, in which the

'expressive imagery of movement, dance, sound, music, drawing, painting, sculpture, poetry, story and drama' (Heron and Reason 2008: 367) expands ways of knowing. **Propositional** knowing—intellectual knowing of ideas and theories—may be SCP if other ways of knowing are not artificially stripped out of it in the pursuit of “pure” science or conformist, professional behavior or presentation of ideas. In addition, **practical** knowing—i.e., knowing “how to do” something, including interpersonal, manual, political, technical, and transpersonal competencies (Heron and Reason 2008: 367)—is again enacted through multiple senses, emotions, and intuitions. The important point to take from this brief analysis is that SCP is a transversal element of Heron's pyramid of ways of knowing—i.e., ways of knowing are embodied, emotional, aesthetic, intuitive, and diverse. To reduce ourselves to narrow ways of knowing is to cut off huge areas of how humans actually know and experience life.

During the PDTG Cluny workshops (Chapter 6), the selection of sociodrama—a presentational form of knowing and communication—was an intentional attempt to use subjective, multi-cognitive methods to generate inter-subjective understandings and help reveal deeper identities and motivations for change than would be possible with other methods. Participants used the sociodramas to revive prior experiences and improvise upon them to show real frustration in the case of Ñoqanchiq, and aspirations of new theory/practice hybrids in the case of Tejiendo Saberes. The sociodramas themselves used complex responsive processes of relating to reveal issues that might not have emerged as easily through other methods.

Presentational knowing—i.e., how we as people re-‘present’ life experience and intuition—is not just a bridge between experience and propositional knowing, but is valuable in its own right (Seeley and Reason, 2008: 4)—informing experiential and propositional knowing, as well as being informed by them (Seeley and Reason, 2008: 19). In other words, presentational knowing that is only used as a creative tactic to enhance thinking for “real”

propositional knowledge remains within the hegemonic European critical worldview, with rational analysis positioned as the apex of sense making (Pettit, 2012b). This begs the question of whether we carried out sociodramas as creative expressions of communication as a tactic to generate better inputs for more rational analysis that comes in a theory of change diagram (for example). Although the theory of change process as I conceived it was also a form of presentational knowledge, it culminated in a product that expresses propositions about the way things are and should be.

My response is that I am not yet sure of the answer. It is possible that we as facilitators were guided by an implicit idea that the end goal in any process is "the practical and polished thing;" therefore, all creative process is ultimately leading to a rational strategic moment, even if that moment seeks out less linear "results," and behaviors more tolerant of ambiguity and more respectful of different understandings of meaningfulness. But at the same time, I am clear that we used "SCP" methods to generate transformational, embodied reflection that generates less fear, more empathy, and more consciousness of ourselves as subjects of transformation.

Complex responsive processes theory explains how novel patterns of activity have a better chance of emerging when agents differ sufficiently from each other, 'so displaying *diversity*' (Stacey, 2007, Stacey et al., 2000). My research has shown that multiple ways of knowing can be an important source of this diversity. If capacity-building is to help us make sense of our complex realities, then methods are needed that tap into locally relevant cultural systems of meaning that reflect the whole person, and continually invite us to reflect on our own worldviews that may constrain or enable our ability to honor diverse "saberes" (Rodriguez Ibañez, 1997). Capacity building has a better chance of leading to capacity development as learning to the extent it employs exercises and approaches

that utilize multiple ways of knowing not as icebreakers, but as unique doorways to personal and collective identity.

8.2.2. Worldviews and Soft Systems Thinking as unique sources of diversity in communicative interaction

The intentional contrasting of multiple, diverse perspectives and worldviews (as they relate to action), generates a unique source of diversity in communicative interaction—thereby exposing and activating enabling-constraints. This Soft Systems Thinking charges conversation with meaning and is capable of changing patterns and generating learning in communicative interaction.

8.2.2.1. Overall reflections

Bringing a “pure” perspective from San Lorenzo to our Quito meeting exposed significant enabling-constraints in the power configuration between Sirua and FFI, which spontaneously changed the conversation that emerged in a direction that no one could have anticipated. The Sirua **timeline drawings** from earlier in the process revealed strong initial positions on the role of communities in Corridor conflicts. Then, **“What is the Corridor”**, drawings revealed diverse understandings on the nature of the Corridor, thus opening up the possibility for later conversations that expanded the definition of “biological Corridor” to accommodate pro-community-inclusion worldviews. The participation of a powerful actor in Fernando Morcillo accentuated this process as San Lorenzo technical staff and rangers revealed significant local knowledge *as they compared their situation to his*, which eventually helped revalue sources of “valid” knowledge in Sirua and changed the conversation in ways that affected “organizational” strategic intentions. Much of the diversity in perspectives was generated simply by including people in the process who have not been historically included, which thus revealed and socialized existing knowledge.

With the PDTG Ñoqanchiq team, the **sociodramas** allowed participants to reenact complex behaviors of primary stakeholders, and to ultimately reveal a sore spot that made them question both the motivations of these stakeholders and the relevance of their own programmatic offerings. Tejiendo Saberes reenacting live participation in protests created a live

laboratory in which Marco could test the market for new less academic publications more geared to local audiences. In both cases, this participation led to deep, often impassioned organic debate.

With both Sirua and PDTG, ***theory of change drawings and relational maps*** revealed strengths and weakness of assumptions on change. When challenged by ideas on post-it notes, new debates were opened as people enabled and constrained each other, thus favoring certain ideas over others. But the use of sociodrama and theory of change drawings as in ***Mode 2 SSM generated an intense contrasting of perspectives***, albeit in a more controlled manner than in the PDTG debate exercise. As teams compared their understandings of change and programmatic offerings to their own real life situations, including behaviors of primary stakeholders in those situations, and to each other's analysis, their appreciative settings changed, and these changes become part of their expressed theories of change. PDTG's "Alternative Communication" team's theory of change (not presented in this dissertation) was widely challenged, which eventually led to its de-prioritization as an organizational team. Weaknesses with its theory of change became very apparent when contrasted with the TS and Ñoqanchiq theories of change.

8.2.2.2. Methodological implications for capacity-building

In my literature review (see **section 2.1.3.**), I emphasized that worldviews explicitly or tacitly condition the types of change that are seen as feasible or desirable by different people, and as such, must be a central focus of any capacity-building process. In both action-research processes many methods were selected with the intention to surface worldviews and use them as contrasting perspectives to generate better questions of real life situations. This soft systems thinking focus was part of all of the examples shared above (8.2.2.1.), and many more. Relatively early on in my overall research, I shared with Juan-Carlos that surfacing worldviews was not nearly as difficult as I had thought it might be. Exercises focused on multiple ways of knowing made it relatively easy to surface many

worldviews, revealing that while they are deeply *held*, they are not necessarily that deeply hidden. After a while, it became clear to both of us that if we let people talk long enough concerning things they care about, their worldviews would surface without a lot of methodology. Worldviews are prominently found in people's stories and everyday life practice and can be revealed by reflective conversation (also see **section 8.2.4**). Indeed, worldviews on militancy, commitment, class, meritocracy, and social change emerged over the process, leading us to ask: *"What do you do with worldviews once revealed?"* Revealing them does not change them, perhaps obviously, because they are deeply *held*. Reflecting on both cases, I believe two main reasons exist as to why surfacing worldviews methodologically—without pretense of changing them—is an important part of generating quality communicative interaction.

First, contrasting perspectives in thought, feeling, worldview, and other forms of perspective makes it difficult to hold on to ideas of fixed, unchanging realities. When deeply held ways of seeing the world are able to be accessed and made subject to challenge, participants may be forced to confront how they 'participate or even collude in sustaining narrow legitimate themes that organize experience, so making change difficult' (Stacey 2007: 447). The two most prominent examples in this dissertation are the cult values "militancy" and "biological Corridor"—values that could not remain unchanged when surfaced and compared to other ways of seeing and acting in the world. However, another important example is how my own understanding of the role of a facilitator changed throughout my process. AR readings had already led me to challenging, on paper (in my research proposal), the idea that facilitators can or should be neutral. Indeed, Burrell and Morgan (1979) showed how neutral methodological stances represent a reproduction of dominant structural functionalist assumptions on change (which are actually focused on non-change, or equilibrium). Entering the politically charged world of social activism with PDTG in particular made me question how neutral I could or should be in practice. In one workshop, as I compared my personal theory of change

drawing to that of fellow facilitator John Torres. I was struck by the political underpinnings of his explanations on change. My drawing was full of systems and complexity concepts, but lacked a political lens. Up until that point, I had been satisfied with this because I assumed the people I was working with would provide the political content. However, as I compared my perspective to John's, I realized in practice how my a-political theory of change was non-critical, which motivated me to understand connections between power and change better.

This situation is an example of an experience that changed the conversation in my own mind, challenging a supposedly neutral self that was a strong part of my "professional" identity, but resonating with those areas of my identity that believe in questioning unjust situations. Interestingly, this experience led me to empathize quietly with Katy when she was experiencing pressure to be more militant. I reached out to her on a few occasions to ascertain how she was processing things, including sharing a recent experience in which I had felt marginalized in a planning meeting for an event with social movements. The convener had facilitated an exercise in which we were to organize into groups based on various criteria, including, in one round, on political affinity. I was not picked up by any groups, nor did I attract to one on my own, but instead stood isolated. Light skinned, American, non-political—an interesting contrast in that moment. Even though I know the exercise well ("la licuadora—the blender")—which intentionally looks to create feelings of inclusion and exclusion and then reflect on the meanings that emerge—my sense of exclusion was palpable and was not very well addressed in the subsequent reflection period. In retrospect, this situation, like the earlier moment comparing personal theories of change, was another important comparative moment for me, slowly contributing to shifts in my own internal dialogue.

As my appreciative settings continued to evolve throughout the action-research, I began to discover my own militancy in the design and use of "radical" epistemology. Many of the most progressive political agendas in

social movements are carried out by the most conservative of methodological stances (podiums, panel discussions, rules based proceedings, etc.) (Giles Macedo, 2012). At one point, in the same meeting as the “licuadora” exercise, I stated that progressive political processes need progressive methodology, which resonated with some and made a lot of sense to me. These changes in my own internal dialogue, and in actions that I have taken to further pursue my emerging politicized agenda, were supported by my exposure to contrasting experiences and worldviews in my action-research.

The second reason surfacing worldviews is important is because diverse worldviews are a powerful source of questions to ask of complex situations (Checkland, 1981, 1993). Stacey criticizes the common assumption on the methodological value of worldviews—i.e., learning is generated simply by surfacing tacit and explicit mental models so that they may be *exchanged* for mental models more in line with an organization’s rational choices, which then equates change in mental model with learning (Stacey, 2003: 327). I agree with Stacy’s critique, but add that the SSM perspective is helpful in that it takes worldviews and systems models based on those worldviews as epistemological devices, and never objective descriptions of reality to be rationally “traded”. The primary purpose of worldview in SSM is to ask better questions of real life situations from diverse perspectives. SSM is a dialectical questioning process ultimately intended to improve the quality of organizational communicative interaction. It was very effective in doing so in my action research.

Revealing Silvia’s meritocracy perspective or Nancy’s Guevarista militancy perspective is interesting but not that useful unless those perspectives can be used to generate unique questions of real life situations. What can we learn about individual or organizational identity from these perspectives? How do they or might they play out in real life situations? For capacity-building, this entails putting worldviews on the table, including discussions of the worldviews behind capacity-building methodology. No neutral process

or methodology exists for intervening in real-life situations in which people's lives and livelihoods are at stake, precisely because of how we interpret and act out our identities, power relations, and theories of change. Including methods that surface worldview is important to promote critical reflection to read better what situations call for, and not simply apply capacity-building prescriptions for change (Reeler, 2007).

The most interesting aspect of this concept for my research, however, is that the process of comparing and contrasting worldviews—and using them to generate better questions of real life situations—can generate diversity capable of shifting patterns of communication. I conclude by proposing that exercises informed by SST serve as a specific type of instigator that intentionally introduces diversity in worldview, which is connected to action. Diversity in worldviews is needed to generate critical reflections, and new patterns of conversation are made possible by the introduction of these new perspectives. However, the focus should be on how changes in these patterns of interaction actually emerge, with worldview serving as an instigator of sorts for supporting the process.

8.2.3. *Methodological redundancy, diversity and learning.*

The use of successive methodological approximations and other “redundancies” increases and improves the quality of questions that are asked of complex situations, and supports shifts in communicative interaction and learning, when diversity is also present.

8.2.3.1. Overall reflections

The Sirua process presented in **Chapter 5** revealed how successive methodological approximations over several workshops played a role in shifting the patterns of communicative interaction in that process. A similar logic of successive approximations was present in the PDTG SSM Mode 2 example from **Chapter 6**. Stacey (2007: 284) notes that the repetitive aspects of conversational patterning promote continuity, and impart stability to social relations. This situation is what CRP refers to as “social structure” and closely linked ideas, such as ‘habits, customs, traditions, routines, mores, norms, values, cultures, paradigms, beliefs, missions and visions’—all of which address the repetitive nature of practices that allow people in organizations ‘to get on with each other’ (Stacey 2007: 284). These multiple social habits may be supported by maps, artifacts, images, and tacit assumptions (Schein, 2004), but they are enacted, reenacted (i.e., sustained), and changed through ongoing communicative interaction (Stacey, 2007). In this sense, social structures, including institutions, cultures, organizations and society, are ‘perpetually reproduced thematic patterns of relating between people taking habitual forms’ (Stacey, 2007: 435). They are not physical, but social objects that arise and are changed through both repetitive and spontaneous communicative interaction.

As noted earlier, diversity is needed to generate spontaneity and explorative conflict, which are necessary for shifting repetitive patterns of interaction. When present in a grouping or groupings of people, diversity may attract into “subcultures” which, as they come into contact with other subcultures and their appreciative settings, may provide a necessary resource for

learning and innovation that increases organizational capacity for dealing with complexity (Schein, 2004: 401). *Without diversity, successive approximation to the issues may amount to nothing more than an amplification of volume in a self-referential echo chamber.* Successive approximations without diversity may further stabilize patterns of interaction and increase discursive capacities to defend hardening worldviews and actions.

On the other hand, the introduction of alternative perspectives, ways of seeing, speaking and acting on things, may be rejected by organizations that find this diversity too foreign or even threatening to their existing ways of interacting. This is because the stable aspects of communicative interaction—including underlying myths, assumptions, worldviews and visions—not only provide structure and stability, but a meaningful sense of self for group members, and clarity and direction in the presence of confusion and mystery (Schein, 2004, Bolman and Deal, 2008). Needed diversity may be avoided or rejected when it threatens overly stable patterns of relating.

8.2.3.2. Methodological implications for capacity-building

With PDTG and Sirua, methodological redundancy does not appear to have created overly stable patterns of relating within the action-research processes themselves, perhaps because redundancy was approached as an experimental form, and not as a tried and true “cult value” that conditioned or directed all methodology. Redundancy emerged, rather than originally being intended. Consider the following salient characteristics of methodological redundancy in my cases:

- Successive approximation to the issues.
- Avoiding premature closure: ‘The transformative potential of... interaction may be blocked by demands for early clarity or closure’ (Shaw 2002: 70).

- Using methods to ask questions rather than to provide definitive answers—i.e. soft systems epistemological rather than ontological intent (explained in the previous section and in **Chapter 6**), which includes the use of post-it notes and other tools to generate questions to stimulate dialogue and keep inquiry open.
- Cycling back, using prior well-produced outputs as mere inputs to a new broader exercise, and thus breaking sequential logic. Another example of this is carrying out additional relational mapping between seemingly well-analyzed ideas.
- In some cases, leaving results in a messy form, without trying to always categorize to find areas of agreement.
- Recording assumptions along the way. As they mature, their imperfect nature and their frequent role in representing discourse rather than critical analysis becomes more evident. The idea of continually improving problem analyses and theory of change “conditions” followed a similar logic.
- Periodic presentation of prior results and advances, both to bring people up to date in new moments, as well as to utilize the results for future planning and action. In other words, the use of action-research itself generates redundancies within its learning cycles
- Providing ample time and space for reflection (see **section 8.2.4**).

Over time, these characteristics certainly generated a “feeling” of repetitiveness, but not of feeling stuck or wasting time (based on evaluations of the processes). I posit that whereas methodological redundancy did not generate overly stable patterns of relating, it did generate a *stable conduit* through which to introduce diversity that did challenge overly stable organizational patterns of relating on various fronts. This stable conduit emerged as an identifiable storyline preserved at all moments. Prior reference points were continually invoked even as participants spoke of intentions for the future. At the same time, redundancy generated a culture of questioning and dialogue that both kept the storyline present, and *challenged the meaning of that storyline* from

different perspectives. Questioning over successive rounds introduces new ideas, alters the story, and does not generate a self-referential process, as long as diversity is present.

Risks and limitations also exist concerning the use of methodological redundancy. Drawing out complexity should be thought of as a generative tool, but it can also be paralyzing and disruptive of fluid communicative interaction. A challenge we as facilitators faced with both processes was knowing when to “complejizar” (i.e., draw out complexity) versus simplify. Marco’s question from the final PDTG workshop captures this dilemma well: *“How much complexity will help us generate changes in our organizational practices? Sometimes complexity helps, but sometimes it overwhelms and limits”*. He then highlighted PDTG’s inability to finish their strategic plan, which was being developed by PDTG on their own, outside the formal scope of the action-research. Marco expressed his feeling that Juan-Carlos and I should not have suggested PDTG use the improved thinking from their theory of change analysis in the Cluny workshops (**Chapter 6**) to improve their strategic plan, even *if* the plan’s programmatic logic and assumptions needed improvement. Instead, he felt that we should have stepped in and helped PDTG finish their plan without trying to improve it—not because the plan did not need improvement but because we should have recognized that they had no bandwidth to do anything else at that point. *“Sometimes to be able to make decisions you need to simplify things—you can open up complexity again later”* (Marco). He added that the last two workshops, including the theory of change workshop (Cluny), were very effective in reducing complexity to get to decision points, but that more balance was needed between generative reflective thinking and actual problem solving “action”. This, I believe, is an inherent dilemma in utilizing methodological redundancy for improving the quality of communicative interaction and for potentially contributing to helpful shifts in that communication.

With both Sirua and PDTG, significant changes in communicative interaction may be thought of, in part, as a helpful fruition born of increased relational

connectedness (Sarra, 2007: 337) which emerges as participants become more fluent with their complexity. Methodological redundancy helped participants become familiar with each other's knowledge, perspectives and patterns of communicative activity, and was a necessary support for changes in that interaction.

For capacity-building, this view implies approaching change process not as an opportunity in which to apply self-assessments and frameworks efficiently, but as an opportunity to enter into a complex web of relations and stories. The goal is to help ask better questions of these stories and histories of relating to identify static, unhelpful patterns and enter into conversations that may help transform these patterns (Shaw, 2002). Methodological redundancy is helpful in this endeavor because it can help reach deeper stories that are not being well represented by efficient anecdotes or predetermined themes from quick and dirty capacity assessments. Morgan explains the analytical reductionist perspective that still dominates the discussion about capacity development:

'Activities should be simple, sequential, linear and stepwise generating maximum outputs from minimum inputs. Human events move through stages as in planning versus implementation. They should also be non-redundant. Also crucial to the machine model is the value of planning, control, order, efficiency, standardization and prediction. Ambiguity, paradox and lack of clarity are seen as constraints to be overcome rather than inherent conditions. Efficiency and effectiveness are desirable and mutually supportive. Process, including that related to capacity development, is a means to an end. Categorization and 'either-or' dichotomization are useful' (Morgan, 2005b: 6).

Sarra notes that the difficulty with this line of thinking is that it is difficult to see how the conditions may be created for people to enter the murky state of confusion and uncertainty that are so necessary for creative endeavor (Sarra, 2007: 336). This resonates with the experience from my research. Leaving the *story* open methodologically (and the use of other redundancies) leaves *inquiry* open in ways that are crucial for the emergence of new patterns of relating (Sarra 2007: 336), and are generally helpful for grappling with complexity.

8.2.4. Reflection as a key component in shifting patterns of communicative interaction

Complexity emerges when reflective conversation is able to take its own shape, unhindered by the structure of method. In workshops, simple communicational reflection may be more important than any method in surfacing and grappling with organizational complexity

8.2.4.1. Overall reflections

In my research, drawings, skits, maps and other artifacts only partially represented the complex storylines that were actually emerging. These artifacts were used to stimulate reaction and interaction, help generate better questions of complex realities, and help connect personal and organizational storylines—in search of better organizational outcomes and healthier relationships between individuals and collectives. The methods themselves provided creative means to express multiple elements of personal identity, while minimum facilitation allowed issues to emergently self-organize and be explored as needed. Leaving open long periods of reflection was central to allowing issues to emerge. In fact, the most important elements of the storylines in each case emerged in long reflective sessions in which participants were able to unpack how they were appreciating different unfolding situations.

The processes with Sirua and PDTG were heavily built around workshops. In those workshops, some exercises had very little initial structure, steps or rules (e.g., PDTG “change in residence”, Sirua “Conversation with Fernando Morcillo”), whereas others were relatively prescriptive and restrictive (theory of change drawings with systemic analysis of conditions, both Sirua and PDTG). However, common to almost all exercises was the use of intentional reflection periods aimed at helping participants make sense of their ongoing experience. This reflection was directly influenced by our incorporation of many principles from Reflect Action, which promotes ongoing reflection and systematization of experience to promote better understanding of transformational processes (Foroni, 2010: 8). In both

processes, we found that even prescriptive exercises, when conducted with sufficient spaces for reflection, could meander and spontaneously attract in ways that were meaningful to participants. Indeed, reflection allowed some exercises to become focused on something other, but perhaps more relevant, than they were intended.

The significant time invested in open-ended reflective sessions allowed workshops to take on new patterns as people's reflective sensemaking revealed rich layers of complexity that simply had not yet emerged in the "action" components of methodological exercises. Multiple spaces for reflection allowed participants to connect the given exercise to ongoing storylines, or for new stories to emerge. This allowed patterns of communicative interaction to take shape even within workshops, and for participants to relate otherwise discreet workshop moments as part of an emerging, yet ongoing narrative flow of events (i.e., as an overall process). This would not have been possible if facilitators had been "efficiently" moving the workshops forward from moment to moment, without significant reflection. In both processes, a culture of reflection combined with a culture of questioning and dialogue, which thereby enabled the emergence of new patterns of conversation that had not emerged earlier. In this reflective, questioning communication, capacity as learning emerges.

8.2.4.2. Methodological implications for capacity-building

If learning emerges as shifts in dominant patterns of ongoing communicative interaction, then external facilitation and methodology should help that interaction develop its own dynamic, not hinder it (Shaw, 2002: 17). Shaw notes how in large formal meetings much of the most important discussion happens over coffee breaks and other informal moments, whereas in highly structured formal moments, people follow rules that restrict their communication, rather than support it. When exercises have a pre-defined outcome and highly prescribed steps for achieving that outcome, no room for creative thought and conversation exists. The purpose and steps of the method *prevent* fluid conversation, and thereby

prevent groups from attracting to important issues that may not have been the focus of the exercise.

Shaw (2002) favors an open conversational approach, which emphasizes the use of method primarily to generate unguarded, unrehearsed conversation in which people in their professional settings may let their guard down enough to discuss things about which they really care. She adapts the edge of chaos concept to express the sort of “fluid conversation” she sees as being most important in human interaction:

‘As a metaphor we can imagine that in free-flowing communicative action, we co-create qualities of responsiveness between us whereby we experience *meaning on the move*, neither completely frozen into repetitive patterns nor fragmenting and dissolving into meaninglessness. From within the conduct of the conversation, what seems solid would be melting at the edges, while what seems shapeless would be gaining form, [simultaneously]... recreat[ing] our situation as both recognizable and potentially novel at the same time’ (Shaw, 2002: 68, italics added).

In this free-flowing communication, the paradox of continuity (i.e., stability) and change are experienced simultaneously, which shift people’s sense of self in relation to others and in relation to common purposes, without causing complete disintegration. In Shaw’s approach, instead of steering the process, facilitators lightly encourage participants to find opportunities for conversations that move agendas forward where organic energy is already present—i.e., people merge into the flows of organizational complexity by generating encounters with other people that feel the energy to act. From within, people enable and constrain each other, and in the process, generate new patterns of conversation relevant to organizational change.

The conversations that emerged in the reflective periods of my research were outside the control and specific design of the facilitators and other participants. This lack of structure allowed for spontaneity that is less likely when all methodological steps are defined for participants (Shaw, 2002). If capacity-building processes are to help grapple with complexity, participants need significant time for reflection, unhindered by method. This necessarily

reduces the time available to “pack-in” more and more supposedly “productive” exercises, and may be seen as a wasteful redundancy. Morgan makes a case for challenging this notion:

‘Conventional approaches are seen to focus too much on analyzing static ‘snapshots’ made up of disconnected pieces... The reliance on reductionism is creating the fiction that prediction and control are workable approaches to dealing with complex systems. It ignores or, worse, destroys the most critical aspects of human systems, e.g. the interconnections... It encourages fragmentation and isolation and an undue concern with individual events’ (Morgan, 2005b: 6-7).

Complexity resides in the deep stories and ongoing narratives that organize organizational experience. Reflection is a fundamental process for entering into these stories and narratives, and should be thought of as one of the most important purposes of capacity-building. In other words, capacity-building methods are meant to generate deep reflection that allows participants to enter into the ongoing flows of organizational complexity. From within these deep storylines or narratives, dominant patterns of communication can be engaged in thoughtful ways. Thought of in this way, the very purpose of capacity-building is deep reflection.

8.2.5. *Power relating, inclusion and exclusion in communicative interaction*

Communicative interaction is always power relating that generates dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. These dynamics affect the patterns of communicative interaction—i.e. learning and change—that emerge. As such, for both practical and ethical reasons, power relating must be critically analyzed through a methodological lens.

8.2.5.1. Overall reflections

In **Chapter 4**, the use of debate and the debate styles that emerged generated feelings of exclusion by Simona, Katy, and José, including questioning of whether they fit in, or even wished to fit in, in PDTG's "militant" space. In **Chapter 7** I presented several other examples of how power relating emerged in methodological moments, each generating different kinds of exclusion and/or inclusion. There were many more examples from both action-research processes that I did not have space to share. Examples abound because regardless of whether relationships are friendly or conflictual, all relating, including all methodological process, is power relating, which generates inclusion and exclusion:

‘To sustain a relation to another person is to actively engage in a jointly created process of mutual constraint that affords each of us opportunities while at the same time limiting us’ (Shaw, 2002: 73) (i.e., enabling-constraints).

Peoples' feelings of being more or less powerful are related to their ability to engage in communication. However, as we have seen in this thesis, people can use rhetoric, aggression, position, charm, and other emotional gestures to restrict or validate the meanings ascribed to a situation (Stacey, 2007: 332). As noted in **Chapter 7**, the practical implication of being unreflective about power relations is that these relations promote or restrict participation, and therefore, the emergence of diverse meanings and fluid communication that may be needed for shifting patterns of interaction. The inability to evolve and emerge into new patterns of communicative interaction may then constrain the ability of organizations to innovate and survive in complex environments. The ethical implications of ignoring power

relating are that we may uphold and localize unjust societal power relations (population-wide patterns) that deprive people of meaning, or even their very livelihoods. All systems—in this case the action-research processes—are meant to serve some human-related purpose (including “conservation” systems), and the decision on who is inside or outside the boundaries of that system is also clearly an ethical issue (Ulrich and Reynolds, 2010, Churchman, 1979).

8.2.5.2. Methodological implications for capacity-building—Power, diversity and ways of knowing

Power is not only a concern for sociologists. Organizations change when the themes that organize conversation and power relations change. These new themes ‘emerge as people struggle to understand each other and as their conversations are cross-fertilized through conversations with people in other communities and disciplines’ (Stacey, 2007: 445). Power enables and constrains every conversation, and therefore, shapes that which emerges. Power relations may, and often do, exclude diverse voices that are necessary for shifting dominant patterns of communicative interaction. Capacity building should therefore contemplate the following considerations:

- How power configurations emerge and affect change.
 - o The Sirua/FFI power configuration proved at least temporarily intractable, yet fundamental for long term “strategic autonomy” of Sirua
- How the interplay of participant intentions supports generative versus destructive conflict and anxiety, and how this promotes or destroys trust (Stacey 2007: 446)
 - o As mentioned earlier, the debate with PDTG damaged trust in spite of the facilitators initially thinking it had been very creative. The Pueblo Libre session over beer, on the other hand, was based on trust and was, therefore, able to emerge into a new pattern of relating.

- How each of us (i.e. facilitators, researchers, participants—literally everyone engaged in a CB process) participates or even colludes in sustaining narrow legitimate themes that organize experience and makes change difficult. This includes developing more acute sensitivity to the often unconscious ways in which we as people create categories of what's in and what's out, and how that affects people in organizations, including by creating dynamics of inclusion and exclusion (Stacey 2007: 447).
 - o The cult values "militancy" and "biological corridor" were narrowly sustained by participants in both processes.
 - o Juan-Carlos and I may have unwittingly colluded in not addressing the effects of "macho culture", as a general theme of importance for PDTG, and even within the action-research process.

This last example—Ana calling out Juan Carlos and me for not following through on problematic machista behaviors that she periodically brought up in the PDTG workshops (as presented in **section 7.4.3.**)—may have some interesting implications with regards to how extended epistemologies (i.e. multiple ways of knowing) actually generate the diversity needed to shift patterns of communicative interaction. Not only were Ana's ideas not given follow through, but the AR process more generally did not use any extended epistemology from an explicitly feminist perspective. This begs the following question:

For grappling with complexity—including the ways in which power relations enable and constrain the patterns of communicative interaction that emerge in different social settings—to what extent should extended epistemologies intentionally represent the diversity that is present within a problematic social situation?

Whether or not the facilitators or other participants chose to attract around the machista theme (see **section 7.5.** for reflections on why others may not have attracted around this theme either), machismo is clearly a

dominant problematic theme in PDTGs programmatic work with all of the organizations they accompany, and in Peruvian society more generally. If Ana felt this were a problem in PDTG internally as well, perhaps the facilitators' responsibility should have not only been to follow through on the issue, *but to actually introduce methods that speak from that neglected perspective* (or ask her to do so). In this sense, "extended epistemologies" is perhaps a misleading term that masks the fact that all methods speak more to some sensibilities than others, and are not implicitly representative of diverse groups.

For example, in the post-debate reflection (see **Chapter 4**), Juan Carlos and Patricio shared how they noticed that both teams took on the theatrical style of argumentative tournaments of the political left, including using well-known destructive gesturing techniques for winning the debate. Later in **Chapter 4** Marco speculated that perhaps the debate came easier to those who have been engaging in this sort of practice for years, and who enjoy political debates, but that the debate style had hindered others' participation. In other words the debate was relevant (yet far from ideal) for surfacing complex gesturing and diverse meanings for some participants, even while it excluded and/or constrained others. The debate—an overtly competitive way of knowing—generated ritualistic role playing, histrionic inflections, biting sarcasm, premeditated exaggeration, prosecutorial questioning, and entertaining humor as part of an ongoing emotional exchange. In its immediate aftermath, Juan Carlos and I—both fans of competitive sports and sarcastic humor—had felt particularly pleased with the exercise! It wasn't until hearing from those who had felt excluded by this style that we (Juan Carlos and me) realized that the exercise had been a true double-edged sword. This leads me to ask: Whose experiences and complexity did this exercise favor and whose did it exclude? With whose ways of knowing did it resonate? To what extent did it help surface the diversity that was needed to challenge dominant patterns of relating; or did it reinforce those patterns?

To illustrate this point further I would like to share a recent experience I had (July 2012, not related to my PhD cases) in a large three-day workshop (about 50 participants) I was co-facilitating in Cusco, Perú. The workshop was focused on initiating a process to design a programmatic strategy for a Belgian NGO that funds and accompanies progressive NGOs and community organizations in Apurímac and Cusco in southern Perú. These organizations work primarily with communities affected by mining, in situations not unlike the “Mining-Alert” example I shared in **section 2.2.1**. The Belgian NGO had convened representatives from approximately ten “local partner” organizations (organizations that receive some funding from the NGO), as well as additional actors with important knowledge and experience in this region. The workshop was to take a “rights based approach” (e.g., see: Boesen and Marti, 2007) to understanding development challenges and possibilities, in part to make sure that typically marginalized voices—particularly those of indigenous and peasant women—would be taken into consideration.

Juan Carlos and I were the lead facilitators as part of a team of five co-designers of the process, including the director of the Belgian NGOs Peruvian office (male), a technical specialist on environmental issues (male), and a Peruvian specialist on capacity building with women’s organizations in social movements (female). Each evening we met (the team of 4 or 5) to reflect on the day’s events and re-plan the following day. On the evening of the second day, while planning the third and final day, we discussed as a team how we were frustrated that participants were not really talking about substantive issues of gender-based violence and exclusion in the rural highlands of Cusco and Apurimac, in spite of the fact that these themes were clearly on the table as part of the WS agenda. We agreed that we needed to open up a session the next morning to discuss “temas ausentes” (absent themes), in order to confront directly why we as a collective group were not discussing these important issues. Methodologically we decided that we would ask participants to break into

groups and design and perform sociodramas that exemplified the missing themes.

The design went according to plan, with the different groups preparing their sociodramas with apparently good energy the following morning. Then, when the sociodramas were performed, something remarkable happened (as we noted in a later reflective facilitator session). Each of the 6 or so groups performed very vivid and animated skits, enacting scenes of women trying to speak up and being silenced in public meetings, other women resisting and insisting on being heard, NGO representatives trying to carry out their projects in clumsy ways, women unsuccessfully or successfully negotiating participation in women's solidarity groups with their husbands, and several difficult scenes of violence or insinuated sexual abuse. Some participants who had previously been relatively quiet and unassuming came alive as actors, demonstrating complex behaviors, cultural codes and interactions that had not emerged in the workshop up to this point. Even more interesting was that over half (we later estimated it to be about 2/3) of each skit was conducted in Qechua and not in Spanish, in spite of the fact that the entire workshop up to that point had been conducted in Spanish (and we had given no language instructions as part of the exercise). Some skits even used Qechua and Spanish dialogue to dichotomize broader social problems that are often enacted between people of different economic and social classes, many of whom use Spanish and ignorance of Qechua as an instrument of power to reproduce the status quo. After the sociodramas Juan Carlos and I opened up a reflection period that went deep into important "temas ausentes", including some participants sharing difficult moments, with very emotional expressions.

I share this example to make a simple point. We as workshop organizers had implicitly assumed that a workshop in Peru should be conducted in Spanish because all workshop participants spoke Spanish. Indeed, Spanish is a common language for those whose first language might be Qechua, or English or Dutch, for example. We had further assumed that creative,

reflective methods—e.g. drawings, co-construction of timelines and mind maps, reflective plenaries, etc.—would “speak” to the different participants learning styles and ways of knowing because they broke out to some degree from the “traditional” ways of conducting workshops that many were accustomed to. But as the workshop space suddenly came alive after two days, in a language many of us could not understand, it became clear to me that some participants were able to express themselves more effectively from within the persona that emerges in their native tongues. They were able to access and perform gestures, meanings, and behaviors that they had not done up to this point when speaking in Spanish. Population-wide patterns of behavior, including behaviors that actively constrain and exclude women, were not only placed on the table but were presented as evidence through live performance. Certainly the sociodrama as a performative way of knowing contributed to this (see **Chapter 6** for a detailed example), but language also clearly contributed as people found their voice, or at least a different voice, in Qechua. The diversity present in this previously unheard voice fundamentally affected the overall workshop conversation, and ultimately the expression of strategic intentions of the Belgian NGO.

I have already theorized that extended epistemologies are capable of accessing diverse ways of knowing that are capable of shifting patterns of communicative interaction in complex environments. Now, upon further reflecting on “the debate” and other AR methods used, Ana’s challenges to the facilitators, and introducing the present example, I wish to further clarify my point: *For grappling with complexity—including the ways in which power relations enable and constrain the patterns of communicative interaction that emerge in different social settings—CB facilitators should seek extended epistemologies that help diverse actors give voice to their diverse embodied understandings of problematic social situations and opportunities.* As we have seen, different “extended” epistemologies extend (i.e. “speak to”) to some people more than others; this is a common point made in adult education (e.g., see: Belenky et al., 1986, 1997, Gardner, 2009, Illeris, 2009, Merriam and Kim, 2008) and action research

(e.g., Heron, 1999, Heron and Reason, 2008, Reason, 2006), albeit with no specific connection to complexity theory. But it is particularly important in organizational capacity-building in complex environments, because complexity is experienced and revealed differently by different people with different experiences and ways of knowing. Capacity building cannot help access the most relevant patterns of communicative interaction if it is not utilizing methods that target or serve the diverse ways of knowing of different actors. As such, CB facilitators need to critically reflect on the extent to which their methods are able to access and build on different people's diverse intelligences and ways of knowing.

Returning to our earlier point of omission, it is clear that the PDTG AR process Juan Carlos and I co-facilitated did not in fact address machismo as an organizational problematic theme. In other words, our methodology did not help give voice to an important perspective. The term "give voice" is not arbitrary. In their study on women's ways of knowing, Belenky et al (1986, 1997) identified different characteristics of ways of knowing that were common to the women in their study (common, but not exclusive to women). An important early distinction they made was that "voice" was more than shorthand for women's perspective (ibid: 18). Instead, "voice" was connected to women's understanding of their own intellectual and ethical development: 'the development of a sense of voice, mind and self were intricately intertwined' (ibid). Many of the things the women in that study spoke about to describe their lives centered on voice and silence, e.g.: ' "speaking up", "speaking out", "being silenced", "not being heard", "really listening", "really talking", "words as weapons", "feeling deaf and dumb", "having no words", ... "listening to be heard", and so on' (ibid). Interestingly, many of these expressions were evident in the women's expressions in the sociodrama performances shared earlier. This raises the question of how well the methods Juan Carlos, Fabricio and I chose in both processes took into account female voices at all (i.e. even beyond Ana's contention). In other words, did the three males who were in charge of most methodological decisions (with enormous power to enable, constrain,

include or exclude with our decisions) give any thought to women's preferred learning styles, or did we assume, as Belenky et al note that university faculty frequently do, that pedagogical techniques appropriate for men are appropriate for women (Belenky et al., 1986, 1997: 5)?

The women's way of knowing study highlights that the importance of "voice" is part of a bigger tendency of women to ground their epistemological premises in speaking and listening metaphors, rather than visual metaphors that many scientists and philosophers often use to express their sense of mind—e.g. equating knowledge as illumination, truth as light, etc. (Belenky et al., 1986, 1997: 18). The authors of that study offer the following reflection on possible consequences of a vision focus over a speaking and listening focus:

'Visual metaphors encourage standing at a distance to get a proper view, removing... subject and object from a sphere of possible intercourse. Unlike the eye, the ear operates by registering nearby subtle change. Unlike the eye, the ear requires closeness between subject and object. Unlike seeing, speaking and listening suggest dialogue and interaction' (Belenky et al., 1986, 1997)

Although we (Juan Carlos and me) never intentionally approached an exercise from an explicitly feminine perspective, it is possible that some of the techniques we did use (techniques that were influenced by Soft Systems Thinking and Reflect Action) may have been compatible with some women's ways of knowing, just as it is possible that some methods did not speak to or give voice to some men, or other identity groups in the action research. José, for example, told us in WS 2 with PDTG that he was feeling a "drawing overload" of sorts. The problem is that we as designers and facilitators assumed that creative "senti-cuerpo-pensante" techniques generally respond to people's needs and learning styles and help grapple with complexity. I can now see that this is not necessarily the case. We did not think enough about what sorts of methods might generate *specific* diversity that was important for understanding complex realities, and for giving voice

to diverse participants. Yet there is much to be learned about what different ways of knowing really means to different people with different views of reality. Some common elements of women's ways of knowing in particular—e.g. emphasis on connection over separation, understanding and acceptance over assessment, and collaboration over debate...’ (Belenky et al., 1986, 1997: 229)—might be particularly helpful for engaging in “fluid conversation” as highlighted in complex responsive processes theory (Stacey, 2007).

As a final note, it is important to mention the perhaps conspicuous absence of women in the Sirua process. The Sirua process participants in general were almost entirely men. Important female perspectives from the communities (mestizo and indigenous), local governments, partner organizations and other key actors were not included, in part because we (Fabricio and me) didn't intend to seek out female perspectives in particular, but also because many participants that were convened did not show up to key events (see **section 8.4**). The few workshops that did involve women were all internal to FFI and Sirua (mainly Kirsten from FFI and Silvia from Sirua's board). In those workshops Fabricio and I did not give any thought to methods that might take feminine ways of knowing into account specifically. The Sirua strategic plan did include intentions for better engagement with women as part of its economic development strategies, e.g.: “...we need to address the gender imbalance in our economic development and training opportunities... because of their respected position in communities and... influence in households”. But the overall result of our “gender blind” approach is that we missed out on and did not give voice to key people and their perspectives, with similar ethical and practical consequences as noted with PDTG.

To conclude, capacity-building process designers and facilitators require continual reflection on how diversity is affected by power relations, and in particular, how we all become caught up in covert political and unconscious group processes, and how these processes may fail to introduce workable

diversity, or may destabilize helpful patterns of relating. Continual reflection is needed on the extent to which deviant or eccentric behaviors, or unofficial ideologies, are allowed to exist and undermine current power relations (Stacey 2007: 446). How are new ideas dealt with in general, and how do CB facilitators deal with new ideas and both see and hear perspectives that need voice? How might CB not only utilize extended epistemologies in general, but also more targeted epistemologies that access the diversity and ways of knowing that are present both within organizations and their broader complex environments. These questions have both practical and ethical consequences, and therefore require ongoing critical reflection.

A note on CRP and other power theories

Although I began this section noting that power is not only a concern for sociologists, it is important to note that CRP and other communicational theories of power used in organizational analysis have limitations that fail to address power relations as critically as do sociological power theories. For example Reed (2010: 153-4) notes how organizational communicative interaction theories conflate agency and structure as ‘inseparable and simultaneously expressed’ and are, therefore, unable to provide adequate explanations of the true effects of stratified social experience. Indeed, different sociological theories on power relationships highlight that much of what constrains people’s future possibilities is the very fact that they are excluded from the ability to engage in communication and other meaningful action (e.g. see Lukes, 2005, Gaventa, 2006, Clegg et al., 2006, Clegg, 2009). The desires and intentions of people in power might manifest themselves as a decision to keep certain people away from the table, or at least keep their issues off the agenda. Similarly, cultural norms, including local organizational culture, may validate certain types of participation more than others, or certain types of knowledge over others (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008), thereby making transformation via communicative interaction improbable to say the least.

Complex responsive processes theory does not assume that an accessible arena for conversation occurs in which people are able to represent their interests in a fair setting, including confronting power constraints effectively. Rather, it assumes that the very decision to exclude, including multiple conscious and unconscious actions that generate exclusion, are also communicational—even as they exclude some in the process, sometimes very intentionally. Stacey advocates paying close attention to the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion and the ideological themes that sustain them (Stacey, 2007: 444), because “good conversation” means

effective communicative *relating* capable of spontaneously shifting patterns. Poor communication means inadequate interaction (Stacey 2007: 272), which could be due to high anxiety, inadequate participation, or inadequate diversity in that communication. If relevant diverse actors and their agendas are excluded from participation in organizational communication, then it is likely that inadequate meaning is emerging, or the meaning lacks diversity needed for change. Complex responsive processes theory does address some of the exclusions that other power theorists address, but it does so from an “effectiveness”, and not a developmental or ethical, viewpoint. Additionally, it avoids study of ‘the wider structures of economic, political, and cultural domination in which [organizations] are embedded’, in spite of the fact that these “societal” patterns of communication affect how power/control capacities are allocated (Reed, 2010: 154). Power theories and critical systems thinking do raise important issues not adequately explained through concepts of communicative interaction. Due to practical considerations, however, I chose not to delve into additional power theories in my dissertation.

8.3. How can systemic methodology be helpful in strengthening organizational capacity in complex social change environments?

As noted in Chapter 2, to think systemically is to establish the nature of relationships between phenomena, and to focus on that which emerges in the process. Methodological redundancy, relational analyses, soft-systems contrasting of perspectives, and the use of extended epistemology, are all systemic and were all fundamental for surfacing and grappling with complexity. In this sense, I have already answered this second research question in detail in **section 8.2**. What I wish to highlight about capacity in this section is: 1) the importance of thinking of capacity relationally, 2) viewing it as an emergent property of communicative interaction, and 3) regarding it as iterative and situational.

8.3.1. Focus on how capacity emerges as people and groups of people connect and relate

All programmatic work (e.g., in the ECDPM framework, the capability “to carry out technical work”) (Baser and Morgan, 2008) is carried out via “relating” processes of communicative interaction. For example, during the PDTG AR, participants expressed the need for “for developing the initiative and creativity to establish and maintaining relationships with social movements”. In other words, programmatically, they desired to relate to actors in social movements and sought capacities for doing so. They also sought capacities for “constructing knowledge with, from and for social movements”. Given that all programmatic work is relating, and that meaning does not exist in the intentions and activities of a single actor, but in the meaning that emerges as people interact, the *capacity to relate* with social movement actors requires ability for empathetic communication. This is consistent with ECDPM’s explanation of the *capability to relate* (Baser and Morgan, 2008), outlined in **section 2.2.2**. If programmatic work is not understood as co-constructed relating, the potential for meaningless intervention arises.

The ECDPM capabilities to commit and engage, adapt and self-renew, and balance diversity and coherence all depend on relating via communicative interaction—i.e., each of these capabilities emerges in patterns of relationships between people. For example, it would be nearly impossible for Sirua to change patterns of interaction that increase its *capability to commit and engage* if it does not increase relating with its own San Lorenzo office, or with external actors. Besides forgoing sources of diversity, its lack of connectivity and responsiveness with that office would likely prevent the conditions for “edge of chaos”—i.e., “fluid conversation”—to emerge. Active relating is also central to the ECDPM *capability to adapt and self-renew*, which is mainly focused on how organizations make sense of their complexity and adapt accordingly. This sensemaking may include repositioning and reconfiguring the organization, improving organizational learning by fostering internal dialogue, incorporating new ideas (i.e., diversity), and learning by doing. Sirua lacked these practices almost entirely, while PDTG had active relating constrained by problematic power relations. Both increased this capability *during* the action-research processes, but the extent to which active relating may continue as a way of working depends on developing new habits for doing so over time.

As Stacy notes, inadequate communicative interaction means inadequate relating (Stacey, 2007: 444). Active relating is what makes learning “organizational”. In this sense, I would propose thinking of the ECDPM *capability to relate* as the main vehicle through which all other capabilities are understood. Low *capacity to commit and engage*, for example, may simply signify lack of relating. Sirua confidence increased as its internal relating increased, which revealed that there was possibly more to build on than previously thought (e.g., as they discovered evidence of energy in San Lorenzo). Making efforts to connect people within organizations seems to be a simple but fundamental step for increasing the possibility for “fluid conversation”.

Seen in this light, capacity-building processes should always seek to engage, surface, challenge, and strengthen relationships and not only think about narrow products that might be guiding an intervention. With Sirua, an explicit intention was the development of a strategic plan. Although this document contains many ideas that emerged in the AR process, actual organizational knowledge is kept alive in relationships between interacting people. Developing a document together, for example, keeps organizational knowledge alive more so than does the document's final existence in a written form (de Geus, 1988). From that point forward, its only relevance and contribution to organizational learning is insofar as it is taken up again in organizational communicative interaction, and/or the extent to which it remains in this interaction as a habitual reference. Capacity, as a form of learning, is not kept alive in documents, action plans, or intentions, but in active, ongoing relationships.

8.3.2. Focusing on capacity as an emergent property of communicative interaction

The preceding example speaks to the idea that both "organization" and learning emerge in the dominant patterns of communicative interaction of PDTG and Sirua. It was not until after several workshops that I understood that the most important learning was not being captured on cards, flip charts and drawings, but was instead present in the back and forth gesturing between participants. However, this realization would fundamentally change the way capacity-building methodology might be implemented. For example, if "the organization" is found in its communication (also see: Taylor and Cooren, 1997, Sillince, 2010, Reed, 2010, Koschmann, 2012, Bisel, 2010, Putnam and Nicotera, 2008), attention must be paid to:

- How methodology affects the quality of that communication, both within the organization and with key "system-level" stakeholders
- How and where ideas are generated and take off in an organization
- How existing organizational structures, hierarchies and procedures affect how people engage in communicative interaction?
- How methods might enable or constrain unguarded, every day, or spontaneous conversation

- How organizational identity emerges in communicative interaction (Koschmann, 2012)

The fundamental idea is that organizational patterns of interaction are dynamic (even when in stuck states) and self-organizing. Does capacity-building methodology flow with self-organizing tendencies or does it try to structure and control change? Reflection is needed on how each of us participates in local meaning making when attempting to strengthen capacities. This includes reflecting on how we as capacity-building facilitators initiate conversations and respond to participants when they gesture back, and whether our interaction is part of any organic self-organizing purposeful movement in the organizations with which we work. Shaw's (2002) idea of starting conversations "where the energy is" and then letting them develop as they will is intriguing. Shaw (2002: 42) advocates shifting the facilitator's role from that of the cybernetic steersman who keeps the ship moving forward according to plan, to that of an opportunistic improviser who 'is always acting into the potential next steps that are almost taking shape—giving into what might be emerging without too fixed an idea of what each move will lead to'. To do so, she encourages people to enter into conversations on issues they find relevant, with other people that have the desire or are willing to explore those issues:

'The point is to work with the potential for change, finding ways of convening forums which tap people's interests, enthusiasms of frustrations and which demand an intensive interaction to create meaningful forms of activity which "move things on" ' (Shaw 2002: 39).

New conversations are generated as needs develop, sometimes snowballing into multiple conversations and other times ceasing for lack of initiative. Within conversations, Shaw (2002: 33) sees her role as supporting 'the process of shaping and patterning in communication as [she] participates...', and utilizing her 'keen sense of the move towards and away from agreement, of shifts in power difference, the development and collapse of tensions, ...the different qualities in silence, the rhetorical ploys, the

repetition of familiar turns..., the glimpsing and losing of possibility, the ebb and flow of feeling tone, the dance of mutual constraint'. She tries to help hold open the interplay of sensemaking—of not knowing—rather longer than might occur in her absence, while trying 'to shift people's perspective that organizational change *is* this process, rather than an end product of it' (Shaw 2002: 33).

Methodologically, it is the interaction itself that becomes the object and focus of action-research, the artefacts on the walls become supporting "props in the drama", and methods, when used, become primarily epistemological devices used to ask better questions and stimulate richer exchanges. The primary point is not to get to the matrix, or the plan, but to strengthen organizational relating in an ongoing narrative. Capacity as learning as emerges as shifts in communicative interaction (and thereby meaning) within these ongoing narratives. Products like those mentioned may be helpful, but are not the purpose of capacity-building.

8.3.3. *Focusing on capacity as iterative and situational*

In the previous two sections I have emphasized how organizations emerge in communicative interaction between people and groupings of people, "inside" and "outside" the organization, who are relating with each other with some reference to an organization's purpose (whether they know this or not). Organizational capacity, then, emerges as *shifts* in patterns of communicative interaction between these relating people and groupings of people. Whether or not this change in capacity is able to influence broader patterns of behavior in an organization depends on 'how responsive agents are in relation to each other, how richly connected they are to each other, [and] how diverse they are in relation to each other' (Griffin et al. 1999: 302). For shifts in communicative interaction to be able to reverberate to any meaningful extent requires active relating that leads to "fluid conversation" (which is the CRP equivalent of "edge of chaos"). As such, I proposed in **section 8.3.1** that one of the most important purposes of capacity-building is to "strengthen" an organization's capability to relate, upon which all other capabilities depend. Then, in **section 8.3.2** I theorized that it is the

communicative interaction itself that is the “product” or evidence of capacity *development*. This implies paying close attention to the storylines that emerge over time in organizations, and attempting to design CB methodology that is responsive to those organic storylines, and not the other way around. If capacity emerges as shifts in communicative interaction, then CB methodology should help or build on that communication, and not hinder it. Furthermore, the production that emerges in workshops, meetings and other capacity-building events and processes—e.g., that which is often found on the walls, in documents, on flip charts, on index cards, in matrices, in reports, etc.—is primarily useful to the extent that it supports relevant reflective communicative interaction. At best, these artefacts may be helpful epistemological devices, but when we confuse them as the result of CB work, they become decontextualized from the rich storylines that produced them, and thereby become abstracted away from real-life complexity.

This leads me to a final reflection regarding action research, external support, and quality CB process. My basic point is this: Organization emerges in communicative interaction and organizational challenges and capacity needs are often deeply rooted in ongoing narratives that have developed into organizational habits. In other words, the themes in need of transforming or shifting are often found in the dominant patterns of interaction—including in the consistent patterns of that which is not spoken about or acted upon. These self-organizing patterns represent organizational identity, which in different moments, may be stuck, chaotic, or more fluid. Shifts in patterns of communicative interaction that generate learning are fundamentally shifts in organizational identity. Thus, capacity-building is about shifting deeply held identity, which requires entering into that identity, and, to the extent possible:

- Participating in the spaces—i.e. the situations (Wenger and Lave, 1991, Lave, 2009)—in which it arises

- Being around organizations sufficiently over time to understand not only behaviors but context and the “rules of the game” in play (Tosey et al., 2012, Tosey and Mathison, 2008)
- Testing out the difference between organizational identity and narrative as discourse or espoused theory, and organizational action (Schön, 1983, Argyris and Schön, 1996)
- Being aware of communicative dynamics, including how each of us participates, initiates and responds to others, and how these dynamics contribute to conditions for fluid communication (Stacey, 2007, Shaw, 2002)

If learning occurs as shifts in dominant patterns of communicative interaction, it is difficult for me to see how “capacity builders” might strengthen organizations without knowing these organizations deeply, and how we might know them without spending time with them and acting with them over time. As noted in **Chapter 3** (see 3.4.2.) action-research attempts to deal with some of these themes with its explicit intentionality to include action and reflection, theory and practice, in participative and democratic relationships, and in emergent processes that use multiple ways of knowing (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). However, just how action and reflection are combined over time has important implications for capacity-building.

In my research, we conducted many actions and much reflection, but we did not follow an explicit “Kolb” cycle of planning → acting → observing → reflecting (Smit, 2007: 4), as is common in much action-research literature (McTaggart, 1991, Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005, Greenwood and Levin, 2007, Altrichter et al., 2002). A number of articles in a recent special issue on action-research of the “IDS Journal” challenge the orthodoxy of linear action-research cycles (Burns et al., 2012: 6). In that journal, Pettit shares that in his experience, action-research processes have been ‘layered, emergent and iterative, with participants making sense of their experiences in different ways at different times’ (Pettit, 2012a: 21).

Burns shares two experiences (Burns, 2012, Harvey et al., 2012) in which action-research could better be understood as generating learning that occurs 'at multiple sites in parallel, and coalesces in cross-stream learning processes' (Burns et al., 2012). Pettit affirms that in this light, Kolb's cycle seems overly linear and logical by placing abstract thinking at the privileged apex of the learning. (Pettit, 2012a: 21). This view is consistent with Heron (1999: 42) who notes that the Kolb cycle is simply a learning model derived from positivistic scientific inquiry implicitly trying test and validate hypotheses. Burns et al. (2012: 6) speculate that perhaps this situation is due to the reassuring nature of following logical cycles, whereby moving sequentially through planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, 'a systematic method can be demonstrated which can be compared to other forms of research'.

I fully share these critiques, and in the main chapters of my dissertation, I adopted learning theories that explained the inherently active nature of learning, and the "thinking" nature (explicitly or tacitly) of action (Stacey, 2007, Stacey, 2003, Shaw, 2002). Action generates simultaneous "sense-making" reflection, and reflection can be a form of action; thus, the two should not be thought of as entirely separate. My earlier explanation (**section 3.4.2**) separated "action" from ongoing "reflection" to highlight that intentional reflection is a necessary element of action-research, and is often neglected in pure "action-based" problem-solving interventions (Smit, 2007, Britton, 2005). However, at the same time, I feel it is a valid question to ask "where is the action" when it comes to capacity-building processes that, although they purport to influence social *change* in some way, may be mostly focused on ongoing diagnostics that remain in a reflective/analytical "talking" phase. As Greenwood and Levin (2007: 5) note, action-research 'is a research strategy that generates knowledge claims for the express purpose of taking action to promote social analysis and democratic social change.' Therefore, although more intentionality may be given to action or reflection in different moments—just as in real life—purposeful action should be clear in action-research, beyond reflection as a form of action. This has

important implications for capacity-building in complex environments. The following quote captures well the clear action imperative within broader action-research ambiguity:

'In reality, the process might not be as neat as this spiral of self-contained cycles of planning, acting and observing, and reflecting suggests. The stages overlap, and initial plans quickly become obsolete in the light of learning from experience. In reality, the process is likely to be more fluid, open, and responsive. The criterion of success is not whether participants have followed the steps faithfully but rather whether they have a strong and authentic sense of development and evolution in their *practices*, their *understandings* of their practices, and the *situations* in which they practice' (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005: 563).

This development and evolution of practices and understandings is clearly linked to *situations of practice* precisely because practices are *situational*. That is, learning, change, action, and reflection occur in real-life situations (Lave, 2009, Wenger and Lave, 1991). If capacity-building is to contribute to shifts in deep-seated patterns of communicative interaction, it must also be situational and embedded, combining action and reflection. The role of capacity-building facilitators would need to be as ongoing "participants" in situated organizational life—not only conveners of participatory workshops. CB facilitators should encourage action and reflection not as part of a linear action-research cycle but because of the situational nature of action.

This understanding of the situational nature of capacity development is consistent in many ways with Lave and Wenger's original²⁴ theory of situated learning (Lave, 2009, Wenger and Lave, 1991, Wenger, 2009), in which learning is taken to be an integral characteristic of social practice (Wenger and Lave, 1991: 34-5). Ongoing situated activity always involves changes in knowledge and action, and changes in knowledge and action 'are central to what we mean by "learning" '(Lave, 2009: 201). At this level situated learning theory—with its focus on 'the relational character of knowledge and learning, ... the negotiated character of meaning, and... the...

²⁴ See "A note on unrelated aspects of situated learning theory" at the end of this **section (8.3.3.)**

engaged, dilemma-driven nature of learning activity for the people involved' (Wenger and Lave, 1991: 33)—is consistent with CRP. Knowledge of the world, its different meanings to different actors, and the relations of humans within it, are produced, reproduced and transformed in the course of activity, via cognitive and communicative practices that cannot be reduced one to the other (ibid: 51). Also similar with CRP, participation in situated activity or practice (understood as communicative interaction in CRP) is an epistemological principle of learning: 'the social structure of this practice, its power relations, and its conditions for legitimacy define possibilities for learning' (ibid: 98). This makes access to people, information, resources and opportunities for participation paramount for learning (ibid: 101).

In both situated learning theory and CRP learning occurs via participation in ongoing social activity. Since ongoing social activity is contextualized, and knowing and learning emerge via engagement in changing processes of human activity (Lave, 2009: 202, 204), capacity-building must also be contextualized by being designed to help increase relating, participation of diverse actors, and contextualized analysis and action in real life social situations. As such, a situational focus on capacity-building might have CB facilitators revive, create or simulate situations in workshop spaces to continue ongoing organizational conversations or start important conversations that are not yet emerging for different reasons. Set-aside workshop spaces that are physically decontextualized from organizational programmatic work can be re-contextualized by making relevant, lived experience, the object of action and reflection. It is within these lived experiences that people, act, interact, uphold, enable and constrain themselves and others—reproducing and shifting population-wide patterns of behavior in the process. Complexity can be more effectively surfaced and grappled with from within these lived experiences.

In a complementary manner CB facilitators might introspect on how to strengthen capacities of organizations in accompaniment of their everyday

work processes. Here we might look to more intentional connections with emerging “workplace learning” theories of how people create new practices, solve workplace problems, and construct knowledge and learning through action in the world (Tynjälä, 2008: 131, Fenwick, 2008: 17). Interest in workplace learning ranges from adult educators with an explicit ethical urgency to learn more about how marginalized groups in particular learn at work, to HR perspectives that support both improved worker wellbeing and/or higher productivity for organizations (Fenwick, 2008:18). Workplace learning challenges the idea that knowledge is acquired in formal learning settings and then applied in the workplace (Fenwick, 2008, Tynjälä, 2008, Wenger and Lave, 1991). This is consistent with the challenge to the idea that capacities are developed via abstract training, diagnostic and action planning processes, resulting in increased abilities which can then be put to use. Recent workplace learning theory looks at how learning actually emerges between people interacting in work settings (defined very broadly), in informal, embodied ways that are embedded in everyday practice (Fenwick, 2008). Building on situated learning theory (Lave, 2009, Wenger and Lave, 1991), learning is seen as a process and characteristic of work interaction rather than an outcome, and can be broadly defined as ‘expanding human possibilities for flexible and creative action in contexts of work’ (Fenwick, 2008: 19). Workplace learning theory is very broad and includes study of similarities and differences between workplace and school-based learning, learning at multiple levels (e.g. individuals, groups, communities, etc.), formal and informal learning, and workplace support for learning (Tynjälä, 2008). But a clear connection with my current research is in the idea that capacity as learning emerges as a highly social activity:

- In contextualized, collaborative experiences which require interaction and dialogue
- In the kinds of real-life challenges that make learning necessary
- Via reflection on past and present experiences in the planning of future activities (Tynjälä, 2008: 135).

Additionally, more recent workplace learning thinking incorporates complexity theory and, like CRP, 'diverts emphasis away from representations of knowledge, away from "solutions" and "evidence-based practice", to accepting the radical contingency of practice itself' (Fenwick, 2012: 157). Again consistent with my research findings, workplace learning theory with a complexity lens 'may point to new possibilities for professional action, new forms of knowing, and even new questions of responsibility within what are increasingly acknowledged to be repressive conditions for professional practice' (ibid: 159).

Change is an iterative process in which multiple situations are weaved into stories, which are sometimes fluid and sometimes messy. Complexity can be surfaced and grappled with from within the deep narrative of these stories in "authentic" situational experiences in which knowledge unfolds 'in processes of action that brings forth new worlds' (Fenwick, 2012: 159). Capacity-building facilitators, to be effective at developing learning and other capacities, must participate in situations to affect change at the story level. With a situational focus on capacity-building, some of the methodological principles shared earlier—e.g. utilizing existing theory, extended epistemological techniques (Belenky et al., 1986, 1997, Heron, 1999, Heron and Reason, 2008, Reason, 2006), multiple worldviews and perspectives (Checkland, 1981, 1993, Checkland, 2000, Ortiz Aragón and Giles Macedo, 2010), and ongoing reflection as epistemological devices intended to charge conversations and broader patterns of relating with meaning—might have particular salience. The action-research processes presented in this dissertation were at their most effective when they did so.

A note on unrelated aspects of situated learning theory

In their original theory of situated learning Lave and Wenger define learning as "legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice" (Wenger and Lave, 1991: 29). Peripheral participation means that people have close enough access to the people, information and resources in relevant communities to be able to learn through participation in social activity. Learning increases as newcomers become part of communities of practice, and eventually become full participants in the sociocultural practices of these communities (ibid). Lave and

Wenger's original definition of communities of practice was simply "social communities" or 'systems of relations among persons' (ibid: 53). They clarified that "community of practice" did not even necessarily imply co-presence of participants, a well-defined identifiable group, or socially visible boundaries, but rather 'participation in an activity system about which the participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities' (ibid: 99). 'A community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice' (ibid). In other words, Lave and Wenger were at pains to avoid reifying the concept of "community of practice", but instead attempted to keep it open as a configuration of people in interaction around themes of common importance—a system of relations among persons. I highlight this because at this level I believe the concept is workable with complex responsive processes, even though it does not focus on complexity per se. After the initial concept was introduced in the original book, however, practitioners quickly reified the concept and made it into methodological tool to be applied in the public sector, education, international development, healthcare, and many other areas (Wenger, 2010: 7). Much critique has been levelled on how the reification of the concept "communities of practice" in many practical applications has led to a powerless, instrumental and a-historical concept of learning through social relations (for example, see: Wenger, 2010, Hughes et al., 2007, Engeström, 2007). But their original theory does retain relevance for understanding learning in complex environments as an emergent characteristic of social practice; via communicative interaction between people and groupings of people.

8.4. How does the complexity of specific organizational change realities affect the selection and effectiveness (i.e. relevance) of the capacity strengthening methodologies used?

With PDTG, internal conflicts and staff turnover changed the nature of the process from the very first workshop. As noted in Chapter 4, when we (Juan Carlos, Marco and I) realized that the group was not in an adequate state to focus on programmatic strategy, we shifted the process to focus on internal integration. This realization led to a shift from exercises focused on strategic thinking to exercises focused more on internal dialogue and personal reflection. The shift was a response to our (Juan-Carlos and I, with Marco) read of the emerging complexity of the situation, and was ultimately helpful in moving the process forward (as explained in **section 4.4.3.**). The shift was based on feedback received by some members, but also from ongoing conversations between Juan-Carlos and myself regarding how we were perceiving participant energy and power relations. We were open to designing the methodology “on the spot” and were willing (albeit not without feeling some anxiety) to discard previous designs when they did not seem to fit.

We made some good calls and some not so good calls along the way. For example, after being sure that we needed to incorporate some more tactile exercises (based on participant feedback), we conducted an exercise in which participants touch each other’s hands through a blanket that separates them, and try to guess to whose body the hands belong. To explain briefly, the males in the group started roughhousing and the exercise ended up negatively affecting the workshop environment for part of that day. Like with the debate, this all came out in reflection and “resolved itself” to some degree, but some lingering feelings remained for the rest of the day. “Getting it right” in the first two workshops did not come easy; rather, it emerged from a trial and error process that generated anxiety in some moments and fluidity in others. The sensitive nature of the early PDTG workshops made this extra challenging.

A few months later in the Cluny workshops, we found, in PDTG, a different organization, which was experiencing fewer “hot” conflicts and was instead focused on clarifying programmatic strategy. In those workshops, we continued to use “personal integration” and identity-based exercises, but also spent much time on deeply analytical exercises intended to clarify strategic assumptions. In **Chapter 6**, I shared how we combined a sociodrama exercise with a theory of change exercise that used relational mapping and several rounds of questioning, to attempt to clarify organizational theories of change. For these workshops, the methodological task was difficult, but less complex, because PDTG’s strengthening committee explicitly knew what they were seeking.

With Sirua, we (Fabricio, Fernando, Julio and me) were limited in our ability to convene participants that adequately represented organizational complexity. We had plans to work with community members in different moments of the process—in workshops or in field visits—but were unable to make it work logistically. In some cases, Sirua’s conflicts with communities made their participation untenable, and in other cases, those who were convened simply did not show up. The same was true of local government officials and other local actors invited to participate, which inevitably reduced the diversity of perspectives present, and thereby, the quality of communicative interaction.

Another challenge was the dynamic of communicative interaction between three different, but related organizations—FFI, Sirua Quito, and Sirua San Lorenzo. Fabricio and I did not know, and did not feel we had been told, of the breadth of activities run out of San Lorenzo. When we became aware we, in coordination with Fernando and Julio, shifted much attention of the action research to that office. In short, the bulk of programmatic complexity was found in and around the corridor, and not in Quito. This “discovery” fundamentally affected the design of new AR moments, as well as the specific methods used.

Similarly, the power configuration between FFI and Sirua (as explained in **Chapter 7**) affected methodological choice. It took until about two thirds of the AR process was complete for participants to “name” the reality that staff from both FFI and Sirua were “running Sirua”. At one point, Fabricio, Fernando, Julio and I carried out an analysis exploring the extent to which either organization had influenced major Sirua decisions in the past year, and this confirmed the reality of mixed Sirua management. At the end of the day, however, we did not fundamentally challenge the power configuration, even though this configuration would have to be transformed for any major strategic change to move forward. In different moments, participants approached the issue as a Sirua governance problem, a resources problem, a strategic problem and a leadership problem. At no point did participants or participant-facilitators come out and say: “this is a FFI power configuration problem”. Yet it was indeed a power configuration problem, in relation to the aforementioned issues with resources, strategy, leadership, etc. I do not feel participants were purposefully trying to avoid reality by not pursuing this broader problem. Indeed the issue was noted as a “roles” problem at the very beginning of the AR process (see **section 3.5.2**). Rather, *I believe the process simply did not “get there”*. We (all participants) developed a lot of trust and good process, but were happy to get to where we did, even if it left a fundamental issue inadequately addressed.

But the implications of not addressing this power configuration are important. In spite of identifying capacities relevant for dealing with complexity, and developing tools that consider Sirua’s limited ability to remake itself in the short term, the AR process was unable to effectively support fundamental changes in Sirua’s management processes, which remain in the same pattern of activity after the action-research was complete. Additionally, it is impossible to know whether other changes—e.g., in patterns of communication, strategic intentions, and organizational learning—that support organizational effectiveness, will be sustained past the period of the action-research. This raises several questions and points

to the limits of discreet capacity-building processes. The power-configuration conversation started, but may not continue, unless Sirua/FFI has an internal process in place to continue addressing it.

A final limitation I wish to mention is that of capacity as resources. Programmatic capacities in both cases, but Sirua's in particular, were heavily constrained by resource availability. Assessing capacities and raising expectations for shifts in those capacities needs to be done more responsibly, in tune with resource possibilities. Sirua's detailed understanding of the technical capacities it needs was an important conceptual advance, but not very helpful if it cannot be implemented. More effort needs to be made to include resource discussions—hard capacities—in strengthening processes (Eade, 2010: 634). Otherwise, we may raise expectations and ultimately contribute to a reduction of the “capability to commit and engage” (Baser and Morgan, 2008). Resource dependency is one of the main issues holding the current Sirua/FFI power configuration together; thus, without new resources in this case, significant change is unlikely.

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8.5. Conclusion

As noted in the dissertation summary, I began my PhD research out of a desire to make sense out of my experience as a capacity-building facilitator, but also out of a desire to become a more critically aware practitioner and teacher that utilizes methodology relevant to people's real life situations. To do so, I set out to research ways in which capacity-building methodology might support social change by considering its complex and contested nature.

During my research these two attributes of social change, combined with my emerging appreciation of how all methodology is enacted via power relations—which are conditioned by standards of good and bad, right and wrong—lead me to the undeniable conclusion that capacity-building methodology is inherently political, regardless of the stance of the facilitator. As Burrell and Morgan (1979) established long ago, supposed “neutral” facilitators with “neutral” methods reproduce dominant structural functionalist assumptions on change. These assumptions are focused on explaining how society arises as an objective and deterministic equilibrium-seeking system of interaction (Burrell and Morgan 1979). This thinking underpins much dominant thinking on organizational management even today (Checkland, 1981, 1993, Jackson, 2000, Stacey, 2007, Stacey et al., 2000), and is certainly present in dominant capacity-building frameworks (USAID, 2010, UNDP, 2008, Company, 2001, VanSant, 2000) that lack connections with concepts of social change (Black, 2003, Clarke and Oswald, 2010, Tandon, 2010, Taylor and Clarke, 2008, Ortiz Aragón, 2010b).

In my own practice over the past four years, I have dropped any notion that that which I do is neutral, and instead, have adopted a stance that does assume that social change realities are inherently complex and contested (each to different degrees in different situations). This belief has led me to shift most of my pedagogy and methodological interventions to include critical questioning and consciousness raising (Friere, 1970, 1993) as a core

purpose of all change processes. As noted in this dissertation, complexity theorists argue that this sort of critical stance is important to ensure that adequate diversity is present in organizations so that change may be possible “at the edge of chaos”. Soft systems thinkers posit that this view is important because all methodology is meant to generate better questions of complex realities. Action-research theorists say a critical stance is important because all humans have a right to participate in their own change processes as a democratic right and fundamental way of knowing. However, most dominant capacity-building *methodology* (which generally lacks explicit theory (Baser and Morgan, 2008)) does not argue for a critical stance or consciousness raising for any of these reasons. As noted in my literature review, there are some notable exceptions (e.g., see: Baser and Morgan, 2008, Eade, 1997, Eade, 2010, Kaplan, 1999, Kaplan, 2000, Morgan, 2006b, Reeler, 2007, Taylor and Clarke, 2008), but these sources are typically normative and do not really offer methodology beyond some overarching principles. The irony is that to do research on capacity-building methodology, I found little capacity-building theory that was helpful in explaining change. I believe this reinforces Burrell and Morgan’s theory of “neutral” methodology and again shows the need for developing new capacity-building theory relevant to complex, contested, social change environments.

My research has contributed new knowledge by helping explain how systemic capacity-building methodology can support processes of social change in complex environments. Systems-thinking is often used anecdotally in capacity-building, without making explicit connections between theory and practice. Complexity theory, when referenced at all in capacity-building literature, is limited to claims about the need to act differently in a complex world. My research has provided empirical cases that connect systemic capacity-building methodology to complex responsive processes theory in a plausible manner, and thus makes these connections more explicit. Specifically, my research demonstrated:

- How organizational learning and change occur through the shifting interacting dynamics of conversations and other forms of communicative interaction, and how organizational capacity emerges in these shifting dynamics.
- How capacity-building methodology can help surface—via communicative interaction—the complexity of social change that organizations face.

Particularly:

- o How methodology that engages multiple ways of knowing is helpful in accessing doorways to diverse thought, feelings, and identity, and how this diversity plays a key role in influencing the patterns of communicative interaction that emerge.
- o How the intentional contrasting of multiple, diverse perspectives, and worldviews (i.e.—SST focus) charges conversations with meaning and is capable of shifting patterns and generating learning in communicative interaction.
- o How two ostensibly oppositional forms of methodology—methodological redundancy and unstructured reflection—enable and constrain how patterns of communicative interaction emerge and support learning, *when diversity is also present*.
- How all communicative interaction enacts power relationships that generate dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, and how these dynamics affect the patterns of communicative interaction—i.e. learning and change—that may emerge.

These methodological findings led to some interesting implications for how CB is conceived and practiced. If capacity as learning emerges in complex environments via shifts communicative interaction, then a core purpose of CB becomes strengthening the ability of organizational participants—“within” an organization and in relation to key “system” stakeholders—to actively relate and interact with each other in organic (i.e. uncontrived) ways. This active relating is situational and as such implies looking for opportunities to “add” systemic methodological support to real-life situations and experiences to engage with deep storylines and emerging

opportunities. This is in stark contrast with many linear approaches to capacity building that focus on assessing “performance gaps” and systematically ‘address[ing] those gaps through a wide array of “performance solutions” (USAID, 2010: 7)’.

At a broader level, my research has made the following important contributions:

- 1) Provided empirical cases that connect systemic capacity-building methodology to Complex Responsive Processes theory in a plausible manner, and thus, make these connections more explicit. (noted above)
- 2) Developed plausible connections between concepts of extended epistemologies (as a source of diversity) and complexity theory
- 3) Demonstrated the relative importance of critical reflection alongside the use of more-structured methods to generate organizational capacity
- 4) Offered—as a conversation starter—an alternative interactive communication understanding of capacity development, which asks critical questions of much dominant CD theory and practice.

I believe that the findings and learning from this research can help generate critical, non-linear approaches to capacity-building methodology that serve the needs of complex, contested social change in a more meaningful manner.

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